



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

Digitized by Google

THOUGHT AND DEED.

THOUGHT AND DEED.

SERMONS

ON

FAITH AND DUTY.

BY

R. HAYES ROBINSON,

*Late of the Octagon Chapel, Bath;
Curate of Weston.*



LONDON:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & Co., STATIONER'S HALL COURT.
BATH: R. E. PEACH, 8, BRIDGE STREET.

MDCCCLXXII.

108. ev. 1848

Digitized by Google

*Dedicated as a small token of affectionate
esteem to the Reverend JOHN BOND, M.A.,
Prebendary of Cudworth, Vicar of Weston.*

CONTENTS.

I. THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST: John iii., 14, 15. Preached by desire at the Bishop of Winchester's Chapel, Farnham Castle, on Sunday Evening, July 5, 1868, before the Bishop and Candidates for Holy Orders	1
II. THE WAGES AND THE GIFT: Romans vi., 23. Preached at Weston Parish Church, on Sunday Morning, July 28, 1871	23
III. ASHAMED OF CHRIST: 2 Timothy i., 8. Preached at the Octagon, Bath, on Sunday Morning, January 28, 1870	40
IV. THREE CONDITIONS OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLE- SHIP: Matthew xvi., 24. Preached at Kendal Parish Church, on Sunday Morning, March 12, 1871	56
V. SLEEPING FOR SORROW: Luke xxii., 45, 46. Preached at Margaret's Chapel, Bath, on Wednesday in Passion Week, 1871	71

VI. CHRIST AND HISTORY : Matthew xi., 3—6. Preached at Weston Parish Church, on Sunday Afternoon, February 25, 1872	89
VII. WISDOM IN SIMPLICITY : Luke x., 21. Preached at St. Paul's, Upper Norwood, on Sunday Morning, October 11, 1868	108
VIII. THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING : Acts xx., 35. Preached at Weston Parish Church, on Sunday After- noon, March 3, 1872	131
IX. PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM : Acts viii., 59, and ix., 1. Preached at the Octagon, Bath, on Sunday Afternoon, December 26, 1869	150
X. THOUGHTS ON THE SECOND ADVENT : Luke xviii., 8. Preached at the Octagon, Bath, on Sunday Afternoon, November 14, 1869	168

PREFACE.

In the Sermons which form this little volume my constant aim has been to show that the theory and practice of Christianity, so often treated as separate paths of thought, cross and recross each other constantly ; that thinking right leads to doing right, and that doing right leads to thinking right ; that Faith and Duty have been eternally joined together by God, and can be put asunder by no human hand.

None of these Sermons were written with any idea of publication ; and I wish it to be distinctly understood that they are printed now in compliance with the repeated requests of various hearers. This remark is made because the author, in the composition of Sermons, has always been guided by a rule which he hopes here briefly to explain and defend. The bearing of this rule on the question of publishing preached Sermons will speedily discover itself.

The prime difficulty of modern preachers seems to spring from the question whether spoken or read Sermons are most effective. It is amusing, if not instructive, to compare the utterances of different men, equally competent, on this subject. For example, an eminent modern divine has declared that read Sermons are not, cannot be, Sermons at all ; and that a man with a manuscript before him cannot be justly styled a preacher. Again, a Nonconformist Minister, who stands in the front rank of men of culture, has declared that the practice of extempore preaching “is as little likely to produce a genuine Sermon as that of improvising is to

produce a great poem." When one reflects that Chalmers, Melville, and Canon Liddon may be classified among manuscript preachers ; and Whitfield, Robert Hall, and Bishop Magee among (in the current phrase) extempore preachers, it becomes clear (1) that neither of these extremes of opinion can be justified ; and (2) that there is some mediating truth, overlooked by critics on both sides, which might harmonize their contradicting verdicts.

The fact is, where a read Sermon produces signal effect, the preacher has usually made himself so familiar with his discourse that he can disengage himself from the trammels of close perusal, and assume something of the spontaneous freedom of the extempore orator. On the other hand great spoken sermons are for the most part prepared paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, in the study ; and are, did the admiring hearers but know it, marvels of fidelity and grasp of memory, not brilliant specimens of sudden production. The bright thought that leaps from the orator's lips like a spark from an anvil, was hit upon and burnished days before, and laid carefully by for the right moment. Possibly this remark applies to other orders of eloquence. Some of Sheridan's happiest epigrams *grew* as slowly as a flower ; and the speaker's adroitness was tested by the skill with which he fitted an old thought in a moment into the passing discussion. Strip the annals of oratory of its premeditated strokes of apparently instantaneous wit, and assuredly the change will surprise those who believe too fondly in the electric action of genius. Diamonds are not found cut and polished ; and to pick up a thought perfect at once both in conception and expression is not given to mortals.

I assume, then, that great extempore Sermons are generally prepared beforehand. This leads me to remark, that we need not wonder if a well-studied manuscript can be made quite as effective

as a discourse so prepared. The consciousness of having to recall the phraseology he has learned by heart, often keeps the speaker from that glowing communion with his theme which marks high oratory. Listening to a great living extempore preacher, I have at least fancied I could detect occasional symptoms of nervous anxiety as to his periods, that restrained his sympathy with a noble course of thought. The preacher with the manuscript before him (however carefully he has learned it) knows nothing of such apprehensions, and can resign himself to the swing of his feeling without risk of losing the thread of well thought words. Here, it seems to me, the advantage lies on the side of the manuscript, *when well remembered.*

Let it not be said that such considerations are unworthy those who profess to be guided in their utterances by the Holy Ghost. That Blessed Agent is given to supplement not to supersede human endeavours ; nor has the sublime and comforting doctrine of such assistance ever been more degraded, than when made the excuse of the sloven's clumsy language, and the authority of the fanatic's crazy axioms.

But when a preacher has decided to use a manuscript he is faced by a second difficulty. Is he to write an *Essay* ? Because he carries his Sermon into the pulpit, is he to prepare a discourse to be read *before* his hearers, not preached *to* and *at* them ? From not fully weighing this question, I believe, springs the dulness or positive failure of so many written Sermons. The preacher does, indeed, insert here and there the familiar "Beloved brethren," "Dear hearers," but the current of his composition, nine times out of ten, is essayistic. He forgets that his business is to write speech, which, as a critic in the *Athenæum* once observed, is a separate order of prose. He does not construct each sentence as a sentence

to be spoken. He rejects a terse phrase, a not ungraceful redundancy, a rather glaring though effective adjective ; "yet," thinks he, "it would suit well, were I speaking." He *is* speaking, or ought to be. His Sermon gains in correctness, and loses in power ; none charge him with inappropriate energy, but all have a secret feeling that he was dull.

In a spoken address, a freedom, I will even say an ambitiousness, of style is not merely pardonable, but expedient and artistic. So turn again for an instant to Parliamentary eloquence, many a passage in the speeches of Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone, which we admire as an extempore utterance, we should designate over-drawn, were it part of a published essay. Preachers may write Sermons, but the Sermons are to be heard. The congregation have no time to criticise, or even to appreciate, sentences faultlessly constructed. The rapid procession of words renders it necessary that every expression should be vivid and decisive ; and hence the very blemishes of an essay may be the brilliancies of a Sermon.

There will be differences of opinion as to the "theory" of Sermon composition here advanced. But this brief discussion will have served some purpose if it enables the author again, and with a better grace, to beg the reader to remember that these Sermons are published by the request of others, and half against a better judgment, which cannot greatly approve of printing preached discourses, even though signally powerful. If any sentiment in these pages be operative on any heart, may it be such as shall promote the glory of the Redeemer, the knowledge and love of God, and the true progress and blessedness of man.

Bath ; April, 1872.



THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up : That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."—John iii. 14—15.

HE saddest spot in all the earth is that where the Saviour of mankind was crucified ; and of all days in the annals of our race the day when He died is the saddest. To that spot cruel hands dragged Him, whose only crimes were truth and justice, love and holiness. There pitiless enemies nailed Him to the cross, and mocked Him, while in slow torment His patient life ebbed away. Upon that dark day the wisest and fairest of the sons of men was driven with hate and

shame from a world which never saw anything so lovely before, and which never shall see anything so lovely again.

Yet, surveyed from a different stand-point, the brightest spot in all the earth is that where the Saviour of mankind was crucified; and of all days in the annals of the race the day He died is brightest. Death became the gate of life when Christ passed through its portals. He died, and those who loved Him wept, not knowing that with Him died unnumbered cares and pains and fears. His blood was shed, and those who loved Him shrank in horror, or bowed down in agony of woe; for not then was it given them to see that great multitude, white-robed and bearing palms, pilgrims of tribulation, who, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, followed, with faltering feet, "the blessed steps of His most holy life," and at last, under His guidance, "passed through death triumphant home."

To-day, my Christian brethren, we hope to learn

some lessons from the cross of Christ. Perhaps, in our meditation, there will appear something of the contrast I have just described. We may gaze on the cross and see it as the very core of moral darkness. We may gaze on the cross and see it as the very source and centre of moral light.

The text brings four subjects before us :—

I. *Sin.* II. *Sacrifice.* III. *Faith.* IV. *Eternal Life.*

I. **SIN.**—To us, familiar with the descriptions of society given by poets, novelists, satirists, statesmen, and philosophers, the description given in these inspired pages may appear morbid. The tendency of modern thought is to make light of sin. We are growing to consider crime as more misfortune than fault. Does a swindling financier scheme for his own advantage until he sends ruin crashing down upon a thousand hearths, and drives the weak, the old, the helpless out into the hard winter of adversity ? We think, as the culprit is consigned to his well-earned punishment, how trying it must be to a man of luxu-

rious habits to wear a felon's dress and live on prison fare! Does some expert in the art of murder contrive to make his bloody deed especially sensational? We are ready immediately with our petitions for mercy, or with our Parliamentary platitudes: "all punishment should seek the reformation of the criminal;" "capital punishment is legal assassination." This shallow effeminate habit taints not merely our views of social guilt, but of all evil whatever. We devise a kind of glossary wherein we give new names to old things. Skilfully our definitions are arranged not to jar on polite ears. Selfishness is the antiquated expression for our modern virtue prudence. Lying is the coarse description of ruder times for the quality we call tact. Licentiousness is a sour puritanical epithet for easy living. Our attitude towards sin is not that of true Christian charity which, exalted far on high, weeps down on evils from which itself is free. Ours is the attitude of an easy toleration which pardons vice, because it is indifferent to virtue. To sum up all,

we condense our languid moderation into a theological dogma : since we are convinced that there is no hell in this world we are ready to deny that there is a hell in the world to come.

Christ's estimate of sin is given in two ways—by His words and by His deeds.

He gives an estimate in words the most forcible and awful. He compares sin to the sting of a serpent. With its poison man's nature is tainted ; and sin, working through all thoughts, feelings, and acts, is hurrying him on to spiritual death.

Like the fiery serpent in Israel's camp, sin has spread disease everywhere, and disease is making the way straight for coming death. Secret or seen, there is a malady in each man's heart, tainting what is wholesome, making corruption more corrupt, growing each hour more inveterate in its nature, and more potent for pernicious work. Then this evil, universal in extent, is, He tells us, ruinous in its effects. Better anything than sin. Better aching hearts, shattered hopes, torn affec-

tions, blasted lives, than consciences loaded and pressed down and defiled with guilt. Pluck out the eye that lingers lovingly on the seducing scenes of vicious pleasures. Cut off the hand that is restless until busy at some bad undertaking. Cut off the foot that is leading the weak nature along illusive paths to where the awful precipice shoots down to ruin. Better the darkest destiny than a destiny of sin. Let the keen knife of adversity shear off the outer luxuriance from life, and leave it stripped and bare, if only the heart within be made fruitful of virtue. Such is the language of Christ. He deals with crime, not as modern sentimentalists fancy. His assumption is, to borrow the eloquent words of a late writer, "that agonies of pain, and blood shed in rivers, are less evils than the soul spotted and bewildered with sin."

In language so solemn, and with thoughts so dreadful, our Master tries to teach us the enormity of sin. Even if His words were His only teaching, well might we listen earnestly to statements

of such marked severity from One so signal for mildness and moderation.

But Christ, by His deeds, has made His words emphatic. He describes sin as an awful disease ; and then to remedy that disease He died. His vivid terrible words were not the tragic fervours of a designing orator. He *felt* the desperate character of moral evil. The life-blood of the Son of God was the only thing to wash away the stain.

If we have right views of God and of the Son of God, this fact will give us a most forcible conception of sin. I am not now pressing upon you any particular systematized doctrine of the sacrifice of Christ. All I assert is that there *was* a sacrifice. He died "*the just for the unjust* :" He is "*the propitiation for our sins*." Now, remember, that God squanders nothing ; neither in the material nor in the spiritual world does He waste His forces. Wherever God uses great means it is for a great end. Apply this principle to the sacrifice of Christ. He was the only

begotten Son of God. In Him the Father was well pleased. Beautiful as the character of the Blessed Jesus appears to us, God who can search into the innermost secrets of the heart, saw more loveliness in that character than all Christian worshippers have seen during eighteen centuries of adoration. Christ was God's *well beloved* Son. Of all beings in the universe of existence He was dearest to God. There was one nature which always reflected the Divine glory, as a still lake reflects the sky and stars. There was one heart which never beat more quickly at the call of evil passion. There was one course where no erring step had to be retraced with pain and tears. There was one life so sweet and clear and good, that from beginning to end it was most like a rare melody played by a skilful hand, a concord of pure, perfect sounds. Yet this was the Being singled out by God as a sacrifice for sin. Who, after this, shall say that sin is a mere speculative evil, an error of judgment, the effects of a blundered education, or the natural results of bodily formation ? These

all are defects which, far other causes than the death of Christ, could have removed. Sin is a real evil, a disease of the will, a mysterious ill inexplicable by us. Only the death of Christ could extirpate it. Oh ! how this fact rebukes our sentimental estimate. Sin was the persecutor that tracked Christ in all His ways. It was sin that made the best Life of all the saddest of all. He, who loved mankind with such pure devotion, who laboured for mankind with such unwearying activity, how should His earthly career have closed ? Surely in the midst of grateful affectionate hearts, alleviating every care, soothing every pain, busy with a thousand kind assiduities, until, wafted by tender benedictions, the spirit passed upward to the skies. Behold the reality. See Him groaning in Gethsemane, prostrate with inconceivable agony. See Him dragged by brutal hands before corrupt judges. See how the scourge falls pitiless on His shrinking frame. See how sharper than the lash there falls the jeer, or the execration of those for whom

He is dying. Follow Him as He treads along that weeping way to Calvary. Watch the quivering of His frame as He is nailed to the cross. See the languor, weakness, and mortal change passing across His patient face. Listen to that awful cry wrung from what unknown tortures of spirit. At last His head drops. His soul has fled. All is over now. Oh! what has brought this intense misery down upon Him, the Friend of the helpless, the Comforter of mourners, the brave, true loving heart? God send the answer home to our hearts this solemn day. *It was your sin and mine.*

II. The second thought in our text is SACRIFICE: "*The Son of Man must be lifted up.*"

It is remarkable that in this conversation of Christ with Nicodemus, which took place in the earliest part of His ministry, there should be a pointed allusion to the death on the cross. Every reader of the Gospels knows that as Christ's days wore on to their close, there stood constantly before His eyes the vision of the cross. Then He had

aroused the hostility of the ruling class. His words and His ways had clashed with theirs. Then the first low murmurings of that terrible hate which slew Him were sounding in His ears. We are not surprised then to find Him anticipating death. Here we learn that in those earliest days of His public life, before He had come to His own, the cross was as clear in His view as when despised and rejected He went forth to die. And that was the view which sustained the Son of God as He patiently laboured among men.

Contrast with such a future that which cheers *us* as we toil along life's dusty and stormy road ! We think—the best and wisest amongst us think—of success honourably earned, of hearts made happy by our work, of friends gained, of children highly taught and sent out full-equipped to the battle of life—of closing years hallowed with peace and prayer—of a quiet Christian death-bed where the bright sunset is effaced by the splendours of a brighter sunrise, as earth serenely melts into Heaven. But He had no earthly prospects like

these. Few were the flowers blossoming on that path which He could follow in all its windings as under darkening skies, growing at every step rougher and lonelier, it travelled on and on to "the bitter cross." Misunderstanding, cruelty, hate, friends falling off, enemies gathering round closer and fiercer, *that was His future!* Yet never towards the most felicitous destiny pressed a beating spirit with such earnest constancy as He journeyed on to His death.

But remember that to admire the heroism of Christ's life, to dwell affectionately on its glory, to set it up the perfect pattern of human duty, is not the only, not the highest tribute which that life claims. The most prominent aspect of the life and death of Christ must still be the *sacrificial* aspect. Keep that out of sight, and though you may escape difficulties, you have only a poor partial view of the Saviour of the world.

I am not indeed about to attempt an explanation of that mysterious sacrifice. The most renowned of English theologians, in the greatest of English

theological treatises,* has wisely rebuked the presumption of those who rush hastily into that mystery; and where Butler feared to tread few can venture safely. Some speak about the death of Christ in an easy familiar way as if Sacrifice and Justification were facts as ordinary and simple as sunrise and sunset. The entire process, they boast, is as clear as an ordinary mercantile transaction. The bodily pain of the dying Saviour, the wounds and streaming blood, are described as if these were the essence of His sacrifice. It was from coarse, narrow, false depictions, like this, Bishop Butler shrank. It is coarse, narrow, false depictions like this which have enabled modern sceptics to brand the noblest of all truths as "a doctrine of the shambles." Brethren, because we believe most earnestly that the Son of God died a sacrifice for human sin—that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law—it is because of this, that we protest against these unconscious libels on the cross of Christ. *How* Christ is a sacrifice for

* See "Analogy," part ii., chap. v., latter part of section vi.

sin I cannot say. I believe He is a sacrifice. *Why* God forgives sins for Christ's sake I cannot say. I believe God does forgive them for Christ's sake. We are not expositors of the metaphysics of the atonement, but none the less do we desire to proclaim its absolute freedom and its boundless fulness. To the uttermost Christ is able to save all that come unto God by Him. To the very worst of the race, shivering on the brink of the grave, pallid with mortal agony, bereft of all time for amended life or "deeds of the law," shrinking from the past whose gloom is haunted by ghosts of crimes that people the darkness with horrors, shuddering before the future, lurid with the glare of Hell, to such an one, hanging by life's loosening thread over the gulf of woe, we can say, not in excitement but with quiet certainty, "Give but one look of penitent faith to a crucified Saviour and that whole terrible past and future will be turned from darkness to light."

III. The third thought in our text is FAITH :
"that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish..."

It is very easy to give a partial definition of faith; very hard to give a complete. We often hear it described as the mere mental belief in the fact that Christ was a sacrifice for sin, while no mention whatever is made of changed affections. Against this objectors have urged that it is most strange if God bestows heaven on those who, without any alteration in feeling or in action, contrive simply to "realize" that Christ died for them. "Are not deeds of the law required?" these reasoners ask. "No," reply the upholders of free justification, "for if good works are conditions of salvation the gospel offer can be made only to those who have opportunities of amendment. There is no gospel offer for the dying."

Observe, then, the difficulty of defining faith lies in this: it must be both a mental and a religious process. It must be a state of the mind which without one deed of the law is pleasing to God. It must be a state of mind indissolubly linked with changed affections. It must be a state of mind perfect without one solitary good work. It

must be a state of mind producing good works as naturally as a tree produces fruit. Let us depict this state, and see how its completeness includes and harmonizes these apparent diversities.

First, there is in the regenerate heart the realization of Christ's life as truly divine, a pattern of all life. "*Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,*" is the watchword of His life. Through all His earthly course this principle guided Him. He disobeyed the bidding of passion and natural inclination. The law of God was always in His heart, and to that law every wish, feeling, thought was steadily shaped. At last He gave the signal proof of perfect submission by becoming obedient unto death. I say the earliest dawning light of faith reveals Christ's as the typical and pattern and perfect manhood. But increasing light reveals another aspect of that life. "*We formed this judgment,*" says an Apostle, "*that if one died on behalf of all therefore all died.*" * Christ's death, then, was not merely typical, it was substitutional. He became as it were

* Alford.

the hostage of humanity. He did what all should do. Upon each of us lies the obligation to live as Christ lived, not doing our own will, but the will of God. When a man realizes this truth he says to himself, "Could I live as He lived, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, a living sacrifice to God, I should be accepted of Heaven." And then he surveys his actual conduct. What a contrast! It is a tissue of fault and failing, miserable realities shamed into deeper turpitude by glorious possibilities. The conviction is settled in his heart that he is vile, weak, helpless. Deep is his sadness as he stands at the foot of his Saviour's cross, beholding in that pale dying form more than the glories of a king. With ineffable affection he looks on his crucified Lord. He longs to be like unto Christ, but between his weakness and that perfection a great gulf of inability is fixed. Thus while he loves and mourns there steals into his heart a new thought. He hears a voice saying "*He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in*

B

Him." He seems to see that far off righteousness, spotless and fair, descending like a robe upon himself, hiding his weakness and guilt. He longed, wept, prayed, strove, to attain to the righteousness of his Lord. Now there is a whisper in his heart, saying that they who trust in Christ and love Him are in God's sight made like unto Him whom they trust and love. So he exchanges the captive's mourning for the conqueror's song :—

" Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,
" My beauty are, my glorious dress,
" Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,
" With joy shall I lift up my head."

IV. The last thought in the text is ETERNAL LIFE.

Sin is the deadly disease of humanity. The sacrifice of Christ can extirpate sin. Faith is the channel by which the virtues of this sacrifice stream down to man. So much our text has already taught us. Now, like a fair plant that, rising from growth to growth, at last reaches fulness, it flowers out in one beautiful thought—Eternal life.

It is a narrow and misleading interpretation of this word which makes it refer to the risen life of the saints in glory. That meaning it of course includes, but not that meaning alone. Let one sentence from our Lord's lips settle this matter. In the tenth chapter of St. John, at the 28th verse, He says of His people, "*I give unto them eternal life.*" So plainly Christ teaches that everlasting life is not to be deferred until our resurrection. Here on this earth, amidst sin, sickness, and the grave, that imperishable existence begins.

Eternal life ! What wonderful realities, what new developments of being may not be enfolded in this expression ? Who can form a conception of *what* a redeemed spirit shall be when unnumbered ages have enlarged its faculties, stored its experience, disciplined its virtues, invigorated its powers ? I know no thought more ennobling than the view given by our Lord of eternal life. Apply it to yourself. Are you battling with your own sinfulness, trying hard to beat down what is animal or devilish in your nature ? As often as you feel

your spirit rising in mastery over lower passion, think that it is so rising by the power of eternal life; that *for ever* you shall rise and soar farther and farther from sin, nearer and nearer to God, mounting up with wings as eagles. Are you a follower of Christ whose duty calls you to minister to the sick, the poor, the suffering? Think, as often as you are busy on missions of mercy, as the sunk eye of poverty brightens and glistens to see you, as the weary sufferer, stretched on the dying bed, sheds a tearful blessing on your kind soothing hand—think, that an eternal life of beneficence is yours; that *for ever* you shall be able to go about doing good. Are you one whose life work is to discover scientific or religious truth—to learn the ways of God? Think, as often as your patient study discloses to your view new aspects of truths that elevate and ennable the mind of man, that an eternal life of increasing intelligence awaits you; that *for ever*, as you scale the heights of eternity, vaster, grander, brighter shall be the sweep of your knowledge. Eternal life! Oh the thought is the sum

of all wonders ! Think, if you can, of *one* life, developed, beatified, during countless ages. Then think of a great multitude, which no man can number, thus developed and beatified. Think of the fathers of the early world, those majestic figures that move in the grey dawn of history—Enoch, Abraham, Joseph, Moses. Think of David, with his vigorous, devout nature ; of Elijah, with his fiery earnestness and iron faith ; of Daniel, with his steady heroic piety. Think of John the Baptist, with his divine humility ; of St. Peter, with his large passionate zeal ; of St. Paul, with his untiring activity and his royal will. Think of the vast companies of believers which each of these names represents. Think of them, not as they were, but as they are, with all the added glory of thousands of celestial years. See that mighty procession marching onwards to perfection. There, in that bright host, not one missing, all the wisest and brightest of mankind are to be found. Glorious company ! Are we to swell its majesty ? Are we to fall into those resplendent

ranks ? Assuredly, if we are believers in Christ. The church below and the church above is all one,—one race, one family, one army. It is the one race, here dwelling in low lands, where the sweeping mists hide the sky, and there is more shadow than sunshine, and more storm than calm ; *there* dwelling amidst glories eye hath not seen, nor the heart of man, in its most exalted moments, conceived. It is the one family ; here living in affliction, ground down by poverty, darkened by sickness, scattered by death ; *there*, secure from such misfortune, renewing friendships, whose felicity and nobleness death can never impair. It is one army ; here in the hard campaign, beleaguered with foes, fighting its painful way onwards ; *there* in the glad triumph, marching unopposed to occupy the goodly land. God give us grace to rise to the grandeur of this destiny ! Amidst this perishable world, battling with mighty and mean passions, God give us grace to rise in thought for one short hour to even the poorest conception of the grandeur of this destiny !



THE WAGES AND THE GIFT.

"The wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."—Romans vi. 23.

 N the world around us we often meet with facts which, as it were, lead up to the doctrines of Revelation. Thus, the Existence of God, Providence, Immortality, are shadowed forth by the order of nature or the course of affairs. Observations of this sort dignify the study of religion. When we discover that Nature herself is the herald of Revelation, both Nature and Revelation rise to greater than their native grandeur ; Revelation glorifies Nature, and Nature confirms Revelation. The study of the world brings

forth shadowy outlines of the great moral truths of the Gospel. Shadowy outlines they are, no more, yet they display, even in their obscurity, a dim magnificence. Then the Bible comes flooding the atmosphere with light, and all stand in clear view. Thus the devout student of nature is like one who at dawn sits on an Alpine summit waiting for the day. Through the grey and misty twilight he can discern gigantic mountainous shapes around him; but his inexperienced eyes scarcely know what is substance and what is shadow, or whether the whole is not a mere illusion his fancy has wrought in the clouds. What appear to be Alps may be only cold, baseless, vanishing vapours. But soon the sun comes up, and, from peak to base, hill after hill is slowly discovered; and what, an hour ago, he half thought to be but fantastic shapes of mist, stand forth immovable, everlasting hills, with valleys smiling at their feet, while down their sides rolls many a bounteous river to beautify and bless the land.

Now the doctrine that sin is deadly in its effects is not new. The Bible has, indeed, given to this truth distinctness, severity which nature never gave, but the doctrine itself is as old as creation.

For even the physical laws of the world now and again bear witness that the wages of sin is death. Innumerable, indeed, are the crimes that elude the vigilance of Nature. Were she the only avenger of guilt, there would be, on the score of retribution, little to choose between virtue and vice. It is only in the one confined domain of sensual sin that nature takes notice of evil deeds. But there her punishments are sometimes appalling. Lascivious and intemperate men carry it with a boastful air for a time, as if they held the secret of enjoyment for which soured fanatics vainly grope. But the day of reckoning comes. Shattered health, blunted senses, premature age are the lightest consequences of immoral living. A troop of fierce and horrid diseases are ever ready to be the ministers of the avenger. It is one thing to see the man of pleasure as supported

by youth and health he hurries along on a sparkling career of self-gratification, draining every cup of delight, gay, brilliant, thoughtless and heartless. But a few years later he is miserable with infirmity. His senses are incapable of enjoyment. Malignant diseases torture his body. His mental faculties are impaired and beclouded.— Surely the worn-out voluptuary, tottering down to his dishonoured grave, bent beneath a load of curses, cries out from his degradation and ruin, that "*the wages of sin is death.*"

A similar intimation is given by the laws of society. There are certain offences which society never forgives. I do not now enquire how far social verdicts are vitiated by hypocrisy and pride : the bare fact that such verdicts exist alone concerns our topic. It is plainly seen by those who study the nature and conditions of human society, that certain sins, flagrant immorality, breach of good faith, fraud, and such daring crimes, strike at the very root of men's happiness. Let vices like these be more common than their

opposite virtues, and society would rush into ruin: states, cities, families would be rent with desperate strifes. Hence, while the code of human honour is often partial, selfish, and dastardly in its dictates, amidst all its uncertainty it testifies to the deadly character of sin. Let a man or a woman pass certain bounds in transgression, and society will never forgive. No repentance washes out the stain. No reformation reconstructs the shattered reputation. The offender is branded with the stigma of an indelible disgrace. Well we know what follows. Either in the desperation of hopeless infamy the sinner goes plunging down into deeper and deeper guilt, reckless and shameless; or, unable to endure the stings of a conscience which will not die, he renounces the world that has renounced him. Who that has stood on the river bridge of a great city at night, and watched the swift black waters hurrying away below, has not shuddered to think how often faces, white with the agony of a last awful resolution, have peered across that parapet, and gazed down *there?* The world that seems so

warm and bright and happy to us had not, in all its scenes of beauty and splendour, one spot so attractive to those broken hearts as that where the cold dark waters rolled. For "*the wages of sin is death.*"

Now these are only intimations of the truth taught in our text. Neither nature nor society visits all sin, or any sin, with regular or unfailing punishment. On the other hand men guilty of atrocious crimes are often shielded by cunning and cleverness from worldly retribution. But now we come to speak of a vigilance which no craft can elude, and no caution can baffle; of a legislation which comprehends in its enactments every conceivable form of sin; of a justice which metes out to the last grain the exact weight of punishment due to each offender; of a retribution which, if it has leaden feet, has iron hands, which may be slow to strike, but strikes at last with the might of an irresistible doom.

Entirely apart from the physical or worldly con-

sequences of sin, which are fitful and irregular, there is a spiritual death which follows it with unerring certainty. This is the real and awful punishment of sin; other punishments are only for a time. The soul shakes off the diseased frame in a few years; that punishment is soon over. Before long the man of ruined reputation takes his final departure from human society, and scorn or censure vex him no more. But the spiritual death, of which those outward disasters were only figures, follows the sinner out into eternity, clings to him when his body is mouldering in the grave, pursues him when he has left the world and all it contains far behind.

The first thought concerning this spiritual death that strikes us is, that it is *the negation of spiritual life*. Whatever is good and lovely in the character decays as spiritual death spreads and increases. Habits of intemperance, habits of avarice, knavery, deceit, malice, any kind of criminal conduct, blights the virtues of the soul, and they begin to droop and die. Day by day the character grows a little

baser and a little baser. The sense of honour becomes more and more blunt. Delicacy of feeling vanishes, and depraving thoughts are more greedily welcomed. Loftiness of thought, high views of men and affairs, slowly sink to a low mean level. The bloom and freshness of youth fade off the nature; and there it is, hard, ugly, and unclean. It, is all because "*the wages of sin is death.*" Surely this aspect of the truth is terrible enough. For scarcely the coarsest infidelity denies that in all the world the loveliest thing is virtue; and to see virtue unfolding slowly like a blossom, with ever new glimpses of inner fairness, is not this the very crown and completion of whatever is beautiful? The soul that with wider experience of life, more intimate knowledge of its follies, snares, and crimes grows sweeter, kinder, braver, surveying men with more enlarged affection, more sensitive sympathy, firmer trust—oh! before that spectacle all else that bears the name of glory sinks abashed away. Real goodness is a glorious thing; and when we remember that the nature of man, which might rise

towards the Perfect Loveliness, sinks from that high destiny, debased by evil habits into corruption and ruin, surely then every possible idea of degradation and sorrowful shame enforce the terrors of the sentence—" *The wages of sin is death.*"

But spiritual death is not alone the loss of holiness. Just in proportion as the capacity for goodness is weakened, the capacity for wickedness is increased. In the body muscles regularly exercised grow in size and strength, while those which are left unused relax and waste. In the mind faculties we bring into play grow lissom and vigorous, and unused powers become unserviceable. So in our moral nature the resolute practice of any virtue makes the power of virtue greater; and at last difficulties, once to the weak spirit like bars of steel, bend at the touch like pliant osiers. In like manner persistence in sin makes sin easy. Crimes that were formerly committed not without straining and effort, are in time committed with natural ease. Thoughts of shame, pity, lingering nobleness once made the bad purpose tremulous; now it goes

steadily on, moved by no entreaty. Sin has its infancy, when first the dictates of conscience are feebly resisted ; its youth, when the crescent powers fit themselves for serious activity ; its manhood, when evil has become a habit, an occupation, a toil, a daily service. Then, when maturity is reached, when immorality is calmly practised without one troubling thought, when falsehood is formally adopted as a means of livelihood, when dishonesty is deliberately recognized as a way to success, when cruelty, revenge, and cold selfishness are selected as maxims of conduct, tell us, languid optimists of our nature, can you *reasonably* contradict the inexorable assertion of the Bible—
“ *The wages of sin is death?* ”

But I can fancy some one asking “ Is this *all* ? Does sin bring nothing more terrible than itself, grown to full strength, and remorseless by long habit ? Nay, but will not sin be easier, sweeter, when conscience is killed, and the unbridled will careers in freedom ? Is there no worm never to die ; no fire never to be quenched ? ”

Before we answer these enquiries let us lay fast hold of one great principle of divine judgment. The sinner's punishment is *the effect* of sinful living ; future woe grows out of our present state : hell is a *result*. Man punishes sin in an arbitrary manner. For example, in a well-ordered community the crime of drunkenness is punished with fine or imprisonment. But fine or imprisonment are not necessarily connected with intemperance : they are joined to it only by the force of human legislation. This is the human method of punishment. Now in what way does God punish drunkenness ? By the clouded brain, the shaking hand, the lassitude, the dejection, which the skilled physiologist tells us are the natural results of excess. This homely example illustrates the divine method of punishment. In the case of an obstinate transgressor earth will be joined to hell by the strongest and finest links of causation.

Now, we say, there *is* a worm that will never die : there is a fire that will never be quenched. We cannot explain what those awful words mean. We

only know that they shadow forth a mystery of misery whose depths no thought can fathom, whose terrors no fancy can paint. We gaze out into eternity searching for some definite prospect. All is dark. But, reverberated through the gloom, we hear the tremendous sentence—"the wages of sin is death."

"But the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." With these words we pass into a new region of thought. Instead of "death" we have "life" and instead of "wages" "gift." Let us not miss the significance of this latter contrast. Eternal death, we are taught, is *earned* by man. Eternal life is *given* by God.

Here, then, we find that precious doctrine, free justification; a doctrine often caricatured by its friends and maligned by its foes, and yet displaying an original grandeur which no misrepresentation can destroy. "*The gift of God is eternal life.*" That one emphatic word strikes at the very root of the notion that human works are helpful in

procuring divine forgiveness. For, notice the order of thought in the text. The apostle has said that death was the reward of evil deeds. If he had meant us to understand that life was the reward of good deeds, he would not in an instant have reversed his language. But there is a kind of joyous *recoil*—is there not?—in his words: “*The wages of sin*,” “*the gift of God*.” “Look on this service and on that,” he seems to say. “There bondage and in the end death; here filial freedom, and in the end life for evermore.”

Eternal life is the gift of God! Could it be otherwise? Can you fancy the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, stipulating with a poor sinner that for so much penitence, so many vows, so many works of righteousness, His great treasure should be exchanged? Can you fancy the Father that pitith His children seeing His prodigal son standing outside His gate in hunger and misery, and keeping him there for a fixed time until He was satisfied with his sorrow, and *then* falling on his neck and

kissing him ? Can you fancy men repenting of their sins with pure contrition, if they were watching to see whether each tear as it fell would wash away a stain ? Can you fancy men serving God with elasticity, devotion, or nobleness, if they were conscious that eternal life was bought, inch after inch, by successive works ? Can you fancy a conscience-stricken sinner turning in his last dying moments to his Father for pardon, stretching out the cold and trembling hand beseechingly, and God spurning the prayer, because the season for good works was past ? Away with the notion ! It debases our conceptions of God. It degrades our ideas of holiness. It gives the lie to the whole Gospel of Christ.

“But the gift of God is eternal life.” No ages exhaust it. Years and centuries roll by, but no final day dawns on its completed purpose. For this eternal life is love—love which no achievements can satisfy, and no ministries fatigue. It increases in strength, it ascends perpetually, but

ever as it rises expanding horizons encircle it with wider and grander sweeps of duty. Love never faileth. Faith may fail. A height may be reached above all heights where in the sublime azure every mystery shall be revealed. Hope may fail. Entranced, dissolved amidst the sudden splendours of some beatific vision which fancy dreamed not of, she may lie down and die. But the eternal life of love shall endure for ever—“*the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

In conclusion, “*the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” This gift so free—so vast, is ours, through, or more properly, *in Jesus Christ our Lord.* How many thoughts are flashed upon us from that one expression! All the causes, circumstances, and conditions of the atonement pass before our minds as we consider these words. It is eternal life in Jesus Christ, for until He came its pulsations were scarcely felt in the great throb and rush of the world’s existence. A few devout Jews, a few only, knew something of its sacred

power ; and it has been truly said, that “ among all the men of the heathen world there were scarcely one or two to whom we might apply the epithet holy.” But when the work of Christ was completed, from the grave out of which He rose, there streamed a subtle energy which diffused itself far and wide, giving a new colour, union, movement, to human society. It is eternal life in Jesus Christ : *He bought it for us.* His humiliation, those painful years of unrequited toil, the garden with its loneliness and agony, the judgment hall with its ribaldry and shame, the cross with its acute bodily and mental tortures—these made up the sum of humanity’s ransom. It is eternal life in Jesus Christ : *He showed it to us.* His own Person displayed all its varied aspects of purity, might, simplicity, grandeur ; His words breathed eternal life ; His actions thrilled with eternal life. It is eternal life in Jesus Christ : *He nurtures it in us.* Looking adoringly unto Him, strengthening with His strength, ripening into His devotion, brightening towards His glory, whatever is good in the

universe shall through the whole course of immortality follow Him whithersoever He goeth. Eternal life in Jesus Christ ! Oh, as thoughts like these flock into our minds, as we think upon the permanence, magnitude, and sublimity of His mediatorial work, we catch the Apostle's meaning when he spoke of "glorying" in the cross of Christ ! Gaze upon that cross and upon Him who hangs dying there ! Think of what that cross and death have done for mankind ! Think what mankind would have been *without* them ! Can we not glory in the cross of Christ ? History in all its records tells no story of such majesty. Imagination in its loftiest flights soars to no height so amazing. We see Him mocked, wounded, bleeding, dying for our sakes, and above His drooped head we hear the roll of the voice of Justice crying, "*The wages of sin is death.*" But in the eyes of faith His death is life for a universe. His streaming wounds are fountains of Immortality. And, like softest music, mercy takes up the proclamation : "*The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"



ASHAMED OF CHRIST.

"Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord."—II. Timothy i. 3.

T is, perhaps, not easy to discover in what way Timothy was likely to have been "*ashamed of the testimony*" of His master. The ruler of the darkness of this world shifts his battle-ground as occasions change, ever fitting his tactics to the present emergency. At one time he tempts men to be ashamed of Christ by confronting them with the prospect of persecution ; at another time he shows them how pomp and fashion sneer at the lowly servants of the cross. Here he whispers,

"If you profess to follow Christ men will call you a canting hypocrite"; and there, still more cunningly, he cries, "All the truly thoughtful men will pity you as a shallow, credulous creature, too timid to enquire, too feeble-minded to reason."

From intimations in the previous epistle we are rather disposed to think that this was the temptation which assailed Timothy. However that may be, in our ears, St. Paul's words sound like a warning against such a snare. For in these days persecution—at least its ruder form—is obsolete. We may be religious and fashionable too. The vulgar habit of branding all piety as hypocritical is repudiated even by scepticism itself. But, all the more because these motives have lost power, does that other motive we mentioned, that dread of being behind the times in an age of "progressing" thought, threaten to make men "*ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*" Not a few leading thinkers openly renounce allegiance to Christianity. Whatever may be said of its ethics, or its teaching about eternity, one thing, they tell us, is clear, the

historical framework which encases the Gospel doctrine, reticulated as it is with miracle, must fall to pieces. You may believe in God—but unless you would exile yourself from the society of the wise and prudent you must not believe that a Christ, supernaturally gifted, has manifested God to man. You may believe in immortality—your reputation as a sound thinker is imperilled if you believe that Christ died and rose again. These are the proclamations made in the name of our modern Goddess of Reason ; and, looking at them, we feel that never more than now was the warning timely—“*Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*”

I do not deny that these opinions may be honestly held. He must be a careless observer who does not perceive that, under the peculiar conditions of the age, doubt has become an intellectual epidemic, which, like physical epidemics, floats unseen in the atmosphere, and here and there seizes on mental constitutions that are in some way debilitated, and unable to resist its subtle

attack. Scepticism is the malady of minds diseased, as well as the sin of judgments depraved. I doubt not, if the secret religious history of our times could be written, we should be surprised to find how many an earnest man has felt unbelief creeping over him he scarcely knew how, enfeebling his once vigorous faith, and spreading a horror of great darkness over his mind, until at last—

“ He faltered where he firmly trod,
“ And fell with all his weight of cares,
“ Upon the world’s great altar-stairs,
“ Which slope through darkness up to God.”

Such error is to be reproved pityingly, as Christ reproved St. Thomas, for it is an infirmity of noble minds. It differs from the strutting scepticism of our light literature, or the pragmatic infidelity of the scientific lecture hall ; for it never displays its doubts as the insignia of intellectual royalty, nor meddles intrusively with creeds which are the guide and comfort of others. But this is the rare scepticism ; those are the common types. We have the poetical scepticism, which can deny the immortality of the soul, in ballads as gracefully

and daintily wrought as those which in lighter moods it consecrates to an amour. We have the newspaper scepticism, with its flippant dogmatism skilfully adapted for the study of the railway carriage. We have the scientific scepticism, which thrusts a scalpel into our hands, and bids us find out, if we can, a soul in man ; or tells us to sweep the sky with a telescope and see if God is there. These, I say, are the common types of scepticism ; and because they are so talkative, so pushing, so supercilious, so influential, whatever is manly in every Christian heart is stirred, as with the call of a trumpet, by the Apostle's words, "*Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*"

The words, "*the testimony of our Lord,*" signify the view which we, as Christian men, are to give of the Life and Teaching of our Blessed Master.

It is undeniable that, all over Christendom, believers and unbelievers acknowledge the beauty of the character of Christ. Spontaneously the

better sort of infidels in our day confess that “ never man spake like this man,” whom we call Divine. Be it fact or fancy, the character of Christ, depicted in the Gospels, is admired assomething which fact has never equalled, and fancy has never surpassed. So strong has this feeling become, that infidelity has actually tried to depict a Christ of its own—a non-supernatural Christ of course. We are told that the miraculous part of the Saviour’s history is but the framework of the picture—a gaudy, tasteless frame—the removal of which, so far from spoiling the portrait, enhances its beauty. An attempt has actually been made to achieve this delicate task. A famous French scholar and critic, using the Gospels as a basis, has tried to reconstruct the Life of our Lord, leaving out everything supernatural. We pass no dogmatic judgment upon this notorious work. But looking at it simply from a historical point of view, we say unhesitatingly that its method is completely fallacious. If the Evangelists are not to be believed when they report the miracles of Christ, how can they be believed

when they report His words ? If they are unfaithful in the greater, who can trust them in the less ? Can you credit as accurate St. Matthew's report of the Sermon on the Mount, and disbelieve him when he goes on to tell how Christ, just as He came down from the Mount, healed a leper ? Do you not see, that if the Evangelists wrote falsely about the miracles of Christ, we cannot possibly trust their reports of His words ? The miraculous is *not* the framework round the Gospel picture. It is the canvas upon which the picture is painted. It gives a finer outline to every lineament, a richer glow to every colouring. If we have not a supernatural Saviour, we have no Saviour at all ; and unless we are content to believe that Christ wrought miracles, and rose from the dead, we must let the noblest character in the gallery of history fade out till not a vestige is left, until the Redeemer of the world becomes as "mythical as Hercules."

"*The testimony of our Lord,*" then, has two aspects. There is a testimony concerning Him as

a superhuman Being, and a testimony concerning Him as a human Being.

I. I observe we are not to be ashamed of the testimony to the Supernatural in the Life and Teaching of our Lord.

I say we are not to be *ashamed* of this particular kind of testimony. It is becoming almost habitual with the enemies of revelation, to speak of faith in miracles as the error of defective or ill-trained minds. Should this opinion become prevalent, it may require some moral courage to assert, in the face of such supercilious dogmatism, our belief in manifestations of the supernatural. As to the validity of the opinion I say nothing now. But this I do say, no man who has studied history need blush to confess himself a believer in miracles. A belief which has commended itself to the almost universal learning of Leibnitz—which has found a place in the profound philosophy of Newton—which the practical sagacity of Bacon, and the metaphysical subtlety of Berkeley have defended, such

a belief, I say, no man need blush to avow. Remembering these illustrious precedents, we may venture to declare our faith in a miracle-working Christ, even at the risk of being thought out of the intellectual fashion: we need not from cowardice disobey, if these mental giants listened submissively to the injunction, "*Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*"

But who are these who speak so scornfully of faith in a miraculous revelation? Admit to the full their ability to expound the laws of physical science, to heal disease, to make life comfortable, to bind the forces of nature and drag them captive at the chariot wheels of material progress. Admit all this; but can they tell you anything concerning those tremendous mysteries of life, death, and eternity, those "shadows cloaked from head to foot," which haunt every life at some time or other. Christ *does* solve these mysteries for those who believe in Him: what can the opponents of Christ do for their adherents? Ask the wisest infidel philosopher a few questions on such subjects. *How*

were the worlds created? He makes no answer. *Is there a God?* He cannot tell. *Is there an immortal soul in man?* Still he is silent. *Which is better, to be a sinner or a saint?* It depends on circumstances. This is no travestied description of modern infidelity—its own prime axiom is, that absolute ignorance of spiritual truth is the goal of all enquiry. It is for this Goddess of human Reason, enthroned in her temple of science—this deaf and dumb and blind idol, before whom, bowed in intensest supplication, you may pour your agonized doubts without eliciting the faintest response—it is for This, I say, that in the name of intellectual progress, we are asked to turn away from the majestic and tender Figure, whom eighteen centuries have adored as Lord of life, Conqueror of death, and Revealer of immortality. Oh! if to forsake Christ be to plunge into a darkness worse than pagan, surely for each of us there is a resistless appeal in the words, “*Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*”

D

There are other aspects of the superhuman in the life and work of our Lord, which we shall not now consider. His sacrificial death, with all its related topics, is, of course, prominent in "*the testimony*" which we are to bear concerning Him as a Superhuman, a Divine Being. But I pass these by, because we may fairly assume that whoever is not ashamed to confess himself a believer in Christ as a Worker of miracles, will not shrink from recognizing Him as the Propitiation for our sins. We shall, therefore, advance to the second part of our subject—*The testimony we are to bear concerning our Lord as a Human Being.*

We are not, then, to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord as the Exemplar of all human goodness.

This is no idle caution. Many men who, without the slightest diffidence, bow at the name of Jesus—so reverencing His Divinity—feel ashamed to imitate Him in daily living. Their secret notion is, that religion in common life is either effeminacy

or hypocrisy. To worship Christ in church seems proper enough; but to copy Christ in the world would be, they think, the forfeiture of manliness. For those who formally devote themselves to piety such a course may be expedient and beneficial: adopted by busy men of the world, it would induce feebleness of character and conduct.

Now were Christ to be judged by many of His recognized followers this opinion might easily be defended. The profession of religion is often associated with habits which, measured even by human standards, are no way excellent. We may deplore, but we cannot deny, that many Christians present to the microscopic inspection of social and domestic intercourse, characters blemished and defective; blemished with habitual insincerity, love of gossip, self indulgence, evil temper; and defective, because somehow vigour of action, honesty of thought, and charity of judgment are strangely absent where most of all they should be conspicuous. The lamentable thing is, not so much that these faults appear, as

that the religion so fluently professed does not seem to restrain them. Alas! if the world gives the Church the character of feebleness and imperfect morality, the Church I fear has done something to earn the reputation. There is at least an outline of truth in that caricature which irreligious men love to draw, and which, presented to the view of the young and highminded as the model of Christian living, so often makes them "*ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*"

But such shame is unjustifiable. In the highest sense of the word only one Christian ever lived—that was Christ himself. Not only the weakest and worst, the wisest and best of His followers, has presented to the world a distorted reflection of that Perfect Manhood. Remember, we do not bid you to imitate Saints, or Fathers, or Apostles. Christ Himself, the only Sacrifice for sins, is also the only Ensample of godly living. Study then His character; try to copy it; and see if *that* enfeebles your mind or your deeds. Imitate Him whose calmness and courage made His banded

persecutors fall to the ground in fear. Imitate Him who dared to tell the orthodox religionists of his time that they were a “generation of vipers.” Imitate Him whose sublime purpose held its way unswerving, alike amidst shouts of “*Hosanna*” and cries of “Crucify Him!” Imitate Him who maintained the cause of the oppressed poor. Imitate Him who said, “*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*” If this imitation does not make you more manly in your bearing, clearer in your dealings, more tender in your sympathies, braver in your ways of thinking—if, in short, what is vigorous and sterling in human character is not developed and strengthened by the imitation of Christ, then it will be neither crime nor disgrace that you are “*ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*”

Let us gather up what has been said. We are to testify that our Divine Lord manifested God to man, solved by His miracles the problems of existence, reconciled by His death the world unto God. We are to testify that He is the Pattern of perfect

manhood, the Exemplar of all virtue, and the Source of all holiness. But in bearing this testimony, guard, I beseech you, against bigotry and fanaticism. Never be found among those who brand scientific enquiry with the name of infidelity, or who try to block up and perplex the paths of historic research. Remember that Christianity being true, no truth, historical or scientific, can really be at variance with it. In practical religion, too, be careful that you do not degenerate into pharisaic strictness. Regulate your own conduct as your conscience dictates; but do not hastily decide for others what books shall be read or not read, what amusements shall be enjoyed or avoided, what society shall be courted or shunned. Above all things, be not ashamed of your convictions. Infidelity is not ashamed to tell man that he is only an upper animal, "something better than his dog;" shall you be ashamed to tell him that he is made in the image of God, and an heir of immortality? The world is not ashamed of its cold, proud, anti-Christian code: shall you be ashamed of the laws

of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge ? However you fail in Christian duty, fail not here. Let it be said that the doctrine of Christ was so high you could not attain to it—so extensive that your narrow faculties did not comprehend it. Let it be said that the character of Christ was so holy, so unspeakably fair, that you, weak and sinful, with dimmed eyes and trembling hand, could not copy that perfect beauty. But set off these failures with one achievement. Never let it be said that with a faltering, broken obedience you responded to this appeal, "*Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*"



THREE CONDITIONS OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP.

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."—Matthew xvi. 24.

CHRIST lays down three conditions of Christian discipleship, "*Deny himself*," "*Take up his cross*," "*Follow me*." Observe, these expressions are not synonymous; one is not added to make another clear; they represent distinct and ascending stages of goodness. *Self-denial* is the first and lowest condition of discipleship; *Taking up the cross* is a second higher condition; *Following Christ* is the third and

ultimate condition, indicating the attainment of a complete christian character.

Our subject, then, is easily marked out :—

- I. Self-denial : Victory over yourself.*
- II. Taking up the cross : Sacrifice of yourself.*
- III. Following Christ : Consecration of yourself.*

I. Self Denial : Victory over yourself. God has endowed us with certain natural desires, some belonging to the body, and some to the mind. These desires are almost numberless, and of infinite range. The lowest class are purely sensual—as the desire of the palate for agreeable flavours. Higher than these rank the desires of the eye for beautiful form and colour, or the ear for harmoniously blended sounds. These are semi-sensual desires, partly depending on the senses and partly on the intellect. Higher still stand purely intellectual desires, such as the love of science, poetry, history. Besides these are other desires of more complex nature. One has a love of fame—another a love of money—a third loves ease best

58 *Three Conditions of Christian Discipleship.*

of all. One has a taste for agriculture—another for navigation—another for arms—and so through endless varieties.

Self-denial is the subordination of these natural and innocent desires to the great purpose of life. In a self-denying man the will stands in the centre of the crowd of inclinations, that fills the heart; not exterminating, but repressing and guiding them as prudence suggests. The absence of this self-denial almost ensures failure or partial success in any life. How often we hear it said, “Such an one would have been a brilliant lawyer, only his passion for music made him neglectful of his professional work ;” or, “What a successful merchant he would have been had not his love of pleasure led him astray !” The men who succeed in life know how to rein-in desire : they are men of *self-denial*.

More than three hundred years ago, there lived in France one named Palissy, who conceived the idea of discovering a method of producing white enamel for earthenware. He fixed his eyes on

this single invention, and during sixteen years he pursued a course of scientific investigation with unwearying patience. At last his stock of money was exhausted, and penury threatened to nullify the researches of his life. His neighbours ridiculed him as the crazy hunter of a dream. His wife upbraided him bitterly for spending his strength for nought. His children cried day after day from hunger and cold. At last all his fuel was consumed, and to keep his chemical fire burning he broke up his furniture piece after piece. Just when all seemed lost he made his discovery ; and, fulfilling the sacred proverb, the man who was “diligent in business” did “stand before kings.” From his dismantled house he passed to a French palace.

Now that is self-denial : that power of curbing all natural desire when a purpose must be gained. Who are they whose names graven on the rock of history as conquerors, sages, statesmen stand for ever ? Men of strong will—men who deny themselves. These direct and govern the

60 *Three Conditions of Christian Discipleship.*

movements of the whole troop of sensualists, egotists, money-lovers, and creatures of fashion that crowd the world. States and armies cannot resist their force—such men are the pivots upon which ages turn.

Self-denial is not religion, but among human virtues it ranks with the grandest and most forcible. Our Saviour makes this a basis of Christian service. “If any man will come after me (be my disciple) let him deny himself.”

II. “*Taking up the cross:*” *Sacrifice of yourself.*

Self-denial is the repression of lower desires that some higher interest may be more keenly pursued. Self-sacrifice is altogether different. It is the absolute surrender of our own interest to the welfare of others. The poor student *denies* himself when he pinches his table to furnish his book-shelf; the poor physician *sacrifices* himself when he declines the fee his patient cannot afford to give.

Here, then, plainly we have not force of will

only but heroism of character. Before a man can sacrifice himself he must be self-denying—the firm-handed controller of his own desires—but, beyond this, he must have a brave and loving heart. Yet even this sublime virtue makes not alone the religion of Christ. A man may “*take up the cross*” and yet be no Christian after all. “*Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned*”—sacrifice to the uttermost, is it not?—“*and have not charity it profiteth me nothing.*” Not that we would survey the nobler developments of mere human nature with the bigot’s scowl; but reason, fidelity, the Gospel bid us boldly say, that the virtue of the natural heart may become so sublime that it thrills us with admiration, so tender that it melts us into tears, and yet fall short of the “*holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*”

I select an illustration of self-sacrifice from Roman history :

In the first Punic war Regulus, a Roman

62 *Three Conditions of Christian Discipleship.*

general, pushed his victorious arms far into the Carthaginian territory, gathering glory at every step. But at last fortune turned her wheel ; he was conquered and taken prisoner. After some time, however, certain noble Carthaginians were, in turn, captured by the Romans. The Carthaginians then bethought them of exchanging prisoners, and sent Regulus on parole to Rome, to negotiate the matter. But Regulus believed himself to be near death, and bravely told his countrymen that they could only lose in bartering a dying Roman for a vigorous Carthaginian general. His counsel prevailed, and he went back to Carthage and died in bonds. Better that lonely fate, than peaceful death purchased with his country's loss.

Now that is taking up the cross—self-sacrifice ; and I need scarcely say, to achieve such a deed requires the most exquisite moral sensibility, and the stoutest energy of will. This is the second condition of Christian service : “ Whosoever doth not bear his cross he cannot be my disciple.” Yet,

even when this is done, the work is not complete : “Deny himself, *and take up his cross, and follow me.*” A man may be both self-denying and self-sacrificing without being a true disciple. To make Christian character complete, our self-denial and self-sacrifice must be like unto Christ’s. This leads us to the last division of the subject.

III. *Following Christ: Consecration of yourself.*

“*If any man will come after Me (i.e. be My disciple) let him follow me.*” Here Christ declares that imitation of Himself is the final condition of Christian discipleship.

Self-denial in the highest form appeared in our Saviour. “*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.*” The most complete self-sacrifice appeared in our Saviour. “*The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.*” But since not all self-denying and self-sacrificing lives are Christian, we must ask

64 *Three Conditions of Christian Discipleship.*

what in Christ's life marked it off from other noble lives. I indicate two characteristics.

(1.) It was a life which ever kept God in view: "*I do always those things that please the Father.*" The active side of our Lord's life was a constant fulfilment of the will of God. The suffering side was of a similar type: "*Oh, my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, Thy will be done.*"

Our self-denial may be admirable, our self-sacrifice heroic, but unless both be done to and for God, holiness is not attained. There (if without irreverence I may make the comparison) is the gulf fixed between the self-sacrifice of Regulus and the self-sacrifice of Christ. Devotion to honour, to his country, to his high conception of manliness, made Regulus choose to die a captive rather than close his eyes with home scenes and loving faces round him. Christ suffered because the Father had sent Him—had given Him a work to do. So we must live righteously, not because sentiment, or the traditions of human virtue, or

the instincts of our own nature bid us. God must be our great obligation. We must stand as "ever in our great Taskmaster's eye" or we do not "*follow*" Christ.

(2.) The second characteristic of Christ's life was that it held the spiritual welfare of man constantly in view: "*I am come that they might have life:*" "*Thou hast given Him power over all flesh that He should give eternal life:*" "*For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified.*" The real end of Christ's life, the final cause of His every act and word, was the spiritual welfare of mankind.

If we deny and sacrifice ourselves merely to heal men's diseases, to enlighten their ignorance, to make their homes clean and comfortable, and yet ignore their souls, we are not following Christ. Exalted devotion may be displayed by those who are working out merely human reforms; but unless, crowning all lower aims, there be the design of giving eternal life to mankind, our labours are not Christian. Let the political

66 *Three Conditions of Christian Discipleship.*

reformer work as strenuously as ever to rectify social ills; let the sanitary reformer push forward his philanthropic efforts to give the poor wholesome food and pure air; but let them try to make political reform, sanitary improvement, means for the spiritual elevation of the people, then they become servants and followers of Christ. So, when you resign any comfort for the benefit of others—give a dinner to a hungry family, teach an ignorant child to write and spell,—let the work be done as to a spiritual and immortal being, and your self-sacrifice becomes Christ-like.

Our whole argument may be thus summed up. Self-denial and self-sacrifice are indispensable conditions of Christian service. Still men who are no Christians exhibit both these virtues. But when we follow Christ in self-denial, and in taking up the cross, then we are His disciples indeed.

I have only touched this great subject; and many relevant matters—particularly its relation to the

Atoning Sacrifice of Christ—I am compelled to pass by silently. I close now with one observation, not unimportant. The popular notion of religion reduces it to a species of sentimental weakness: reclining, tender dispositions, shallow brains, are said to make the best saints. The feebleness and inconsistency of our piety may possibly justify that sarcastic estimate; but I assert, on appeal to the text before us, that without bringing into play the mightiest forces of human nature a man cannot be a Christian in Christ's sense of the word. Deny yourself like Palissy, sacrifice yourself like Regulus—you have only laid the foundation of Christian discipleship. It is admirable, when taunted with the fancied weakness of our religion, to observe how Christianity chooses out the strongest parts of the character and lays its basis there. The Eddystone light-house, built to brave any tempest, is constructed in this way. In the live rock grooves are cut, and huge blocks of granite are dove-tailed into that solid foundation. Into these blocks others are dove-tailed in a similar way,

68 *Three Conditions of Christian Discipleship.*

so that the light-house and the rock on which it stands are almost one ; and now more than a century that structure has defied the rage of sky and sea. True Christian character is like that—grooved and fitted into the stoutest virtues of human nature, based on self-denial and self-sacrifice ; and the structure of true personal Christianity shakes with no storms of life. Are we told that such Christianity is not taught in our sensation tracts and sensation sermons ? not produced in our fashionable churches and our thronged meeting-houses ? Ours be the shame if that be true ! Nevertheless such is the Christianity of the Bible, the Christianity of Christ ; and wherever you find a true Gospel Christian there you find a man whose religion is sustained by the very strongest forces human nature can produce.

Two practical thoughts to conclude. A large number of us here assembled make what I may call a daily profession of Christianity. What do our lives exhibit to a world which scrutinizes us

closely, and on the whole judges us impartially ? Is there any visible difference between our conduct and the conduct of those we sometimes call *children of disobedience*? It used to be said that the Roman citizen walked the earth with a loftier air than common men. If the religious man be a shuffling dealer, self-indulgent, craftier at a bargain than his unregenerate brother, is he not a libel on the Lord who bought him ? Think of the solemn words : “ *The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.*”

Young men and women are before me whose hearts beat with ambition and expectation as their feet touch the threshold of life. My young brothers and sisters—Money, Fame, Fashion, Pleasure are calling to you, “ *Follow me.*” The witty, the brilliant, the showy, whisper to you that Christian life is a paltry, weak-spirited affair. Listen. Obey the call of Money, Fame, Fashion, or Pleasure, and in all probability you will never accomplish any thing which might not be achieved by a drudging

70 *Three Conditions of Christian Discipleship.*

slave or an abject coward. Christ you cannot obey unless you are free and brave. If by faith and prayer you reproduce in your conduct somewhat of the self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-devotion of your Saviour, you thereby prove yourself courageous, true, tender, high-souled.

“He is a freeman whom *the Lord* makes free,
“And all are slaves beside.”





SLEEPING FOR SORROW.

"And when He rose up from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."—Luke xxii. 45, 46.

ABOUT the place and circumstances which form the back-ground of the text I say nothing. Gethsemane, like Calvary, gains not, rather loses grandeur when the haze of a descriptive verbiage is thrown over its scenery.

Upon one fact in the narrative I wish to fix your attention to-day. In the parallel passages (Matthew xxvi. 36, and Mark xiv. 32) we plainly see that in anticipation of the coming of

Judas and the multitude, the disciples were bid to "watch." Instead of watching they slept while their Master prayed—slept (this is the gist of our subject) not from indolence and heedlessness, but because "*sorrow*" weighed them down. None the less however they failed to watch, and the result was that the betrayer and his band drew near unobserved; and escape was already hopeless when the Master uttered the reproachful words recorded by St. Matthew: "Sleep on now and take your rest; behold the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

To endeavour, without any violent distortion, any strained conceit, to modernise all that, and apply it to ourselves in this age, is my task to-day.

I. Our starting-point must be this great truth: Beside that spiritual and ineffable companionship of Christ with His people implied in the words, "*Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world,*" there is another presence

scarcely less important. Christ presented in the doctrines of the Gospel is with us always. Christ the Truth as well as the Life and the Way. Christ depicted by the Evangelists, Christ declared in the Creeds is ever moving in our midst. Yes, our ascended Lord is with us, almost as actually as He was with His first disciples. Did they sit at His feet and hear His words ? We do the same day by day. Did they marvel at His miracles of restoration, when He poured the day on sightless eyeballs, or made the lame to leap “exulting like the bounding roe ?” Still He speaks, and souls long blind with unbelief see by faith things invisible to human eyes ; and characters, lamed by years of sin, *walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.* Did the first disciples misunderstand His sayings, and wonder and dispute what His words signified ? Are we not this hour wrangling over texts and doctrines as hotly and as stupidly as they ? Did they ask to sit at His right or left hand in His Kingdom ? We still crave wealth, position, fame, as a reward

for our ministerial service. Did they cry, "*Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us?*" We still go groping after God in history, God in science, God in providence, until we forget God in Christ. Did they say, "*Except I shall thrust my hand into His side I will not believe?*" Are we not as ready with our finely-poised scales of evidence, dropping in arguments, watching keenly while the balances vibrate betwixt faith and doubt? Did One stand in their midst, calm, assuring, tender, who scattered every obscurity and rebuked every fault, whom all united to trust, to worship and to love? Blessed be God, in the midst of clamorous parties and emulous sects, stands the one majestic Figure, Redeemer, Brother, King, elevated far above the cloud of their dogmatisms and the din of their quarrels. At sight of Him the angriest controversialists fling away their text-books, and melt their discordant voices into one solemn hymn of worship and praise.

But Christ is present with us now, not merely

to instruct ignorance, cheer despondency, silence rivalries. Just as those disciples, on the dark night of betrayal, were called to watch over their Master's safety, so are we now called to defend Him against His enemies. Still, as critical junc-tures rise up in the history of the faith, does our Saviour bid us watch and pray that we may, if possible, defeat the machinations of His foes. And, surely, there is danger *now*—so formidable, so overwhelming is the array of adversaries—that we sink down in hopeless despair; and be found in the very hour when our stoutest activity and our most thorough earnestness are needed, "*sleeping*"—sleeping, not for sloth, but for "*sorrow*."

II. How does Christianity stand related to one large and influential section of the community—our lower classes? Are these, on the whole, friendly or hostile to the Christian faith? Are they defenders or assailants of Christ? The larger proportion of these classes wield political power, and will in future greatly influence the

national character. A graver peril to our holy religion than the alienation from it of these classes I cannot conceive. Look, then, at the present religious condition of the English working and lower orders. Take first the class of all most cultivated, active, and powerful—the artisans. The application of science to mechanic arts leads the more intelligent of these men to study the laws of nature. The cheap press sets before them day after day the various questions, political and religious, which occupy the public mind. These men are learning to think for themselves, and to think methodically. But all testimony unites to tell us that the larger number preserve attitudes of indifference, or contempt, or dislike to the Gospel of Christ. Some are avowed infidels; many are habitual neglecters of religion; only a few are members of the Church. Now here are men who must be reached by peculiar agencies. The Gospel must be presented to them so as to satisfy their shrewd intellects, and at the same time touch their callous hearts. The preachers

who shall do for such men what Wesley did for their ancestors a hundred years ago, must have not merely Wesley's glowing zeal and persuasive eloquence, they must share Wesley's familiarity with various modes of religious thought, his practical knowledge of human nature. Unless a ministry somewhat of this kind be offered to intelligent artisans, they must, by all the laws of society and man, go from bad to worse. Turn to the agricultural classes : is their state more hopeful ? Scarcely. Among these, indeed, there is but scanty mental development, and consequently but little expressed antagonism to the Gospel. But who that knows the average English agricultural labourer, whose sole religious knowledge, if he have any, consists of a few fragments of the Catechism, imbedded in stupidity ; who has little more idea of personal godliness than the horse that ploughs his field—can deny that, in the Apostle's sense, he is an atheist ? Finally, descend to that lowest grade of all, the large and increasing class who prowl about our great

cities, living as they can. Most of these have no definite position in society, so the statistician cannot place them in his register. They have no vote, so the statesman scarcely detects their presence as he feels the pulsations of national life. But as Christians we should see no difference in an immortal soul, whether lodged under a beggar's rags or the glory of a King.

"Are they not men, though knowledge never shed
Her kindling beams on each neglected head ?
Are they not men by sin and suffering tried ?
Are they not men for whom the Saviour died ?"

It was *the lost* Christ came to seek and to save. How little, oh, how little is the Gospel doing in *our* hands to save the lost around us ! Brethren, looking at these three great sections of our lower orders, and remembering the Lord's words, "*He that is not with me is against me,*" can we deny that the majority of our poorer fellow-countrymen are enemies of Christ ? Do they not resemble that mixed multitude which came to seize the Saviour in the garden—some malignant

and some only careless, but all compacted in hostile unbelief? And is there not danger that *we*, surveying the enormous mass of such opposition to Christ which in the present day we are called to overcome, may abandon the attempt in sheer despair; and like those disciples be found *sleeping for sorrow* at the very moment when our Lord is betrayed?

These, my brethren, are no inapt meditations for Passiontide. At first sight, possibly, it seems most fitting that during this Holy Week we should sit beneath our Saviour's Cross and think each of his own salvation and his own Saviour. But may we not profitably expand our meditations? Was the Victim slain for us alone? Did He not *taste death for every man?* Are thousands—millions—of our fellow countrymen living and dying in enmity to the Lord who bought them? If so, beneath the shadow of the Cross we can ask no fitter questions than these: Are we, singly and collectively, doing what we can to bring the

lost to the Saviour of the lost ? Are we *sleeping for sorrow*, or worse still, sleeping for indolence ? Sleeping away the months—the years—the opportunities ? Sleeping, and waking to hear the Master say—*What ! could ye not watch with me one hour ?* and then sleeping again ? Or, sleeping, it may be, to wake no more, until in the hour of death we unclose our heavy eyelids and see the money, the time, the talents we might have given to Christ vanishing for ever ; and hear the stern words echoing through the silence of conscience—*Sleep on now and take your rest ?*

But other dangers beside such as spring from ignorance and neglect threaten the Christian faith. Some of these I shall briefly notice.

Does any sober Christian doubt that a serious peril to the Church—which is His body—in our day arises from want of unity ? A most pathetic petition of Christ's great prayer was, that the Church might be *one*, as the Father and the Son are one. With words like these in our recollection,

we must frankly admit that nothing can be more disheartening than the disunited state of Christendom. Mark : it is not disunion in the Romish sense we deplore. Not in the existence of various "particular or national Churches" (to borrow the language of Article xxxiv.) do we necessarily detect symptoms of weakness or failure. But *the heart* of Christendom is rent. Look at our own Church. Are we not "carnal ?" Did ever the cries, "*I am of Paul*," and "*I of Apollos*," and "*I of Cephas*," and "*I of Christ*" sound louder or more discordant than now ? I grant there are matters of faith for which men are bound to contend, even with a brother. But do they not love the very contention itself ? Are not the bitterest passages in their controversies most relished ? Do they not like best the papers that deliberately exasperate every quarrel ? Experience and love to Christ have indeed schooled some to a catholic and tolerant temper. But even those—who feel an inexpressible longing for real unity—cannot conquer the conviction that unity is impossible ; that the feuds *must* grow hotter ;

that the breaches cannot be healed. The wisest and the best among us survey a warring Christendom and weep ; but, alas ! instead of watching and praying, instead of working and hoping for better things, they remain inactive, *sleeping for sorrow*.

Or glance at another besetting danger which may be suggested by our disunion. During the past half century there has sprung up in this country an opinion that Church and State should be separate organizations. No wise man will deny that the multiplied and vigorous, and now traditional schisms in England, make the question of Church and State delicate and difficult for a Statesman to handle. I am not going to cut the gordian knot with one rude dogmatic blow. I do not say that our relations with the sects are altogether just, brotherly, Christlike. This I say : the separation of Church from State would be a betrayal of Christ. For hundreds of years Christ has been looked upon as the Supreme Ruler of our kingdom, and this because Christ's religion is

“established among us.” At the very summit of our legislation, above all our estates, legally recognized as supreme, stands the Lord and Saviour. Our laws can never be openly anti-Christian until He is deposed from this position ; but, that done, public opinion must become the sole and shifting standard of right and wrong. Yet such a betrayal of Christ is contemplated. The multitude is already gathering to accomplish the design, and we—His disciples—we whom he has bid to watch and pray—what are we doing ? Are we publicly explaining the enormity of the sin ? educating others up to a broad and elevated view of the question ? No, we are mournfully reiterating that “the tide has turned”—that “eventually the change must come”—that “the force against us is greater than the force on our side”—*Sleeping for sorrow—sleeping for sorrow !*

One section in the band of Christ’s opponents I have yet to mention. In all the centres of our intellectual life there can be found knots of

thoughtful men who, unable to satisfy themselves concerning religious truth, avowedly adopt a general doubt as their creed. Such men are often influential. Sometimes their intellects are finely tempered by reading, experience, and reflection. Sometimes their morality is spotless, their philanthropy lofty, and (certainly in the case of one of the class not long dead) their sense of the sinfulness of sin intense. It is not the coarse, the vicious of our youth these men captivate ; nor the plodding average minds. No ; cultivated, sensitive, enthusiastic, searching intellects—the very flower of our rising manhood—are their prey. Brethren, we do not tremble for the Gospel ; fiercer conflicts than the present have only made its invulnerable and immortal strength the more manifest. Not for the Gospel, but for souls we tremble. We fear not that the Rock of Ages will be swept away ; but we do fear that souls, to whom the Rock might have been a refuge, “ till the storm of life was past,” may be swept from their foothold, beaten and drifted through the darkness and the tempest whither—

whither ? But is there not danger that we who are ourselves secure in faith, may shrink from the struggle with this so formidable unbelief—abandon all hope of leading disloyal souls to the obedience of Christ—content ourselves with ministering to those who are already His people ? Is there not danger that we may mentally resolve to use only the shepherd's crook—to lay aside the soldier's sword ; that instead of studying modern unbelief, so as to adjust our reasoning to its peculiarities, we content ourselves with republishing apologies addressed to the thought of other days, making the past fight the battles of the present ? What would this be but *sleeping for sorrow* in the very presence of the betrayers of our Lord ?

III. Two practical thoughts, rested on two emphatic words, close our subject. *Why sleep ye ? Rise and pray !* Here is indicated that spirit of mingled activity and devotion in which we are to watch with our Lord.

(1.) *Rise : act.* Be no longer supine. Do some-

thing for the religion you profess. There is not one before me but has a special Christian work assigned him, which he alone should accomplish. So vast is the field of Christian enterprise, so manifold its duties, that all capacities are fitted with suitable tasks, adequate opportunities. In this tremendous conflict of Christ with Satan—of the Church with the world—each of us can take a part. Is there one here to-day who, after reviewing his position, could say, “I do not see any way in which I can help on the cause of Christ?” Assuredly not. To you and to me, if until now we have squandered our strength, Christ draws near this hour and, bending down, He asks, *Why sleep ye? Rise—*

(2.) *Rise and pray.* Our Master requires of us, not action merely, but action consecrated and guided by prayer. There is such a thing as prayerless labour for Christ. There is such a thing as visiting busily, teaching eagerly, distributing tracts—yes, and preaching sermons—so assiduously that we win applause for our hard work, and yet the

whole may be prayerless and unblest. *Rise and pray!* Remember, one act, one syllable, suffused with deep and earnest prayer, may be more powerful for good than volumes of words, or years of deeds, which the Holy Spirit has not been asked to bless.

These, my brethren, are the considerations I have ventured to offer you as the conclusion of your Lenten meditations. Fear not, even in Passion-tide, to banish awhile all thoughts about your own personal salvation, that you may reflect on the salvation of Christendom. It is related of Wilberforce that one day he told a friend how he had been years absorbed with his efforts to liberate the slaves. His friend said, "How did your own soul prosper all that time?" "Oh," said Wilberforce, "I was so busy that I forgot my own soul." Yet all that time his soul *did* prosper—he grew in grace and in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour. So shall we find that work done for Christ will bring us closer to His Cross than any self-examination,

however searching, any meditations, however rapturous. We shall find it true of spiritual as of temporal things, that *the liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*





CHRIST AND HISTORY.

“ Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

“ And said unto him, art thou he that should come, or do we look for another ?

“ Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see :

“ The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

“ And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.”—
Matthew xi. 2—6.



NEED allude but very briefly to the history of this passage.

St. John the Baptist, imprisoned by the fickle and despotic Herod Antipas, wasting away in a dreary dungeon the life that had hitherto

exulted in its own ascetic freedom, saw the shadow of a strange, sad doubt creeping slowly across the clearness of his hopes. Like other devout Jews, the Baptist firmly believed that the Messiah would be a mighty prince who should conduct His followers in triumph along ways of temporal glory. Was then this reality—his own ignominious captivity—compatible with that sublime ideal ? Would the forerunner of an all-conquering Christ be suffered thus to pine in fettered loneliness ? St. John could not but doubt it. He began to fear that Jesus was not the Christ. Sent from God, however, he knew Christ to be. One mightier than himself had come : that he felt. So, assured that Jesus would solve his dark, tormenting doubts, he sent his disciples to the Master asking, *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

Here we shall depart from the historical connection of the text, and consider it as illustrating a phase of modern religious life.

Eighteen centuries have passed since St. John's

imprisonment, and yet listening to the voices of Christendom in our own time we plainly hear echoes of his question floating in the ocean of confused sounds. The question is not asked by those devout souls who rest all their trust in Him whom they delight to call adorable Redeemer, Friend above all others. Confident from a thousand varying experiences, whenever the world tries to allure them from His side they turn upon Him, crying with more passionate affection, *Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!* Again, the question is not asked by those infidel souls who see no comeliness in Christ; whose clever sneers are always insinuating that piety is either masked cunning, or self-deluding fanaticism; whose sublime philosophy decides that God is only a notion formed by imperfectly educated minds; whose soaring morality spurns the doctrine of immortality as a pretty fable fit for the childhood of the world. These, at the bare mention of the august claims of Jesus, cry in fury, *We will not have this man to reign over us!* There are

other souls who dwell in the border land between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan ; who walk in a twilight ; a twilight where dawn is shining into day, or where evening passes into dark and dreary night. Hours are frequent in the lives of such men when they are almost persuaded by the insidious whisper of scientific infidelity that all religious teaching is pure delusion ; that we can be certain of nothing except the truths of mathematical and physical science ; and still more there are easy Epicurean moods when this miserable dogma is positively welcomed. But, at other times, pulses of a nobler nature beating within, waken far different thoughts. Religious feelings start somehow into spontaneous life ; and before their eyes Heaven seems to be unfolding in visions of love and holiness. They begin to feel that science, for all its fine promises, cannot feed the deepest hunger of the heart. They begin to suspect that there may be an illimitable destiny awaiting man. So in an agony of mental strife they hurry, as it were, into the presence of

Christ ; and ask, their lips quivering with the intensity of the question, *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another ?*

Now it is because Christ's reply, though originally addressed to one particular state of mind, contains most valuable teaching for Christians of every sort, that we, who are sharers neither of the Baptist's outward nor inward trials, hope to learn something from it to-day.

It is instructive to imagine the different replies which different theologians in our day would give to such a question as the Baptist's. One, lawyer-like, would shew the well-articulated history which connects modern Christendom with her Redeemer's miraculous life. Another—the philosophical divine—would turn the metaphysical side of Christianity on the enquirer, and dilate upon its fine adaptation to human nature. A third—the experimental theologian—would content himself with an appeal to the conscience of the universal Church, which in all sects, lands, times, has instinctively acknow-

ledged that Christ was sent of God. Each reply would have a value of its own, but in essence all would be different from that given by our Lord.

In this answer there are two leading thoughts.

I. First of all Christ pointed to His own conduct, and said that a proof of His Messiahship was visible there. With a few rapid strokes He drew a picture of the doings of His life. The blind received their sight—the lame walked—the lepers were cleansed—the deaf heard—the dead were raised up. It seems that in Christ's view the miraculous power which wrought these works was not alone a convincing witness to His divinity. One miracle, lately performed, was physically far more astonishing than any of those He mentioned ; yet, most probably, because it was not so directly benevolent, He silently passed it by. Not when the fury of the stormy sea sank into peace at His word, but rather when His mighty power, tender in its strength, bound up the broken-hearted, was Deity most clearly seen, shining through His lowly manhood.

The miracle of mercy, with a louder, sweeter note than the miracle of power, sang forth the glory of the Son of Man.

Here, then, neither Evangelist nor Apostle, but Christ Himself, becomes the critic of His own life. Standing, as it were, outside His doings and surveying them He selects some particular actions as most of all visibly divine. He chooses something different from the aureola of fancies with which theology loves to adorn Him. He does not constellate the golden laws He has laid down, the vivid revelations He has given, into a dazzling witness to His divinity. He says not, "Never man spake as I, and therefore I am the Son of God;" but, "I am a healer of sickness, a comforter of weary hearts, the champion of the defenceless. I hold supernatural power, and I use it, not to establish myself forcibly among men, but to wipe sorrow's streaming eyes, and to change mourning into songs of praise." Does not this reply come with exquisite fitness from Him who is *meek and lowly in heart?* A philosopher would have re-

counted his discoveries, and shown with nicety how and where he excelled preceding teachers. An enthusiast would have vaunted his miraculous powers, and declared himself in virtue of these ruler and lord. Our blessed Jesus pointed to the beauteous blending of divine power and human tenderness conspicuous in His conduct. That life, strong as God, loving as a father's heart, was to the spiritually-minded the surest evidence that Christ was indeed *He that should come*.

- We may find instruction in this fact. We are too apt to think that our light shines before men most clearly when our religious profession is most decorous and complete. Yet our Saviour, when asked if He came from God, chose as a proof of His divinity, not the spotlessness, but the beneficence of His life. Would you convince men that your religion is indeed heaven born? See to it that you minister to the bodily wants of the sick and suffering. Let there be few pious words and many pious deeds. Do not indeed suppress all mention of spiritual things when you administer temporal

relief: that is to degrade an immortal being by shewing him only such charity as you would shew a horse or a dog. Copy the glorious wholeness of the charity of Christ. Let your ministries be fitted not to suffering men and women only, but to heirs of kingly dignities impoverished for a while in this waiting world. Let the fragrance of heaven hang around your earthly gifts, and your charity will share and imitate your own immortality, and when its outward work is done, and its outward substance perished, it will rise to a more exalted service and breathe blessing on souls that are never to die.

Brethren, we sorrowfully confess the many sins of the Christian Church. She has often alloyed her Lord's pure spirituality, dimmed and discoloured His clear views of truth, perplexed the simplicity of His creed. Yet, amidst all her failures, she has nobly copied His benevolence. The Christian Church has always been a Church of charity. Look at her in what age you please—Apostolic,

mediæval, modern ; search out what section of her adherents you please—even the most fantastic and fragmentary of the sects—and you still find this plain duty of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, prominent everywhere. No austere or sensuous theology, neither poverty nor profusion of ritual has stifled in the Christian conscience the voice which ever bade believers copy their Master's practical goodness. Launching out anathemas, sinking down beneath worldly pomps and vanities, poring over creeds with a microscope, and pronouncing every flaw fatal—at these times the Church was a libel on her Lord. But there was always this one redeeming trait : from the heated council chamber and the gaudy court, from bare conventicle or sumptuous cathedral, she emerged into a world of sorrows clad in the quiet vesture of charity. She entered the poor man's home, and, gazing pitifully on the lank hungry faces, pressed into the trembling hands food and raiment ; and, through the tears that stood in those hollow eyes, her form glistered into angelic loveliness. She

stood beside the bed of sickness, and soothed the tossing sufferer until quiet sleep came with dreaming glimpses of paradise. When the father, guiding his little family band across the wilderness of life, was suddenly smitten down, her gentle form quietly took his place, and she became father of the fatherless and the husband of the widow. Homes for the aged, hospitals for the sick, refuges for the destitute, schools for the poor, all have flourished under her fostering care. Through her benevolence, if by none other of her actions, Christ has been glorified on the earth. All her charities, from the cup of cold water to the munificent endowment which has benefited generations, have been given for Jesus' sake and in Jesus' name ; and all the thanksgivings her bounty has elicited have been conscious or unconscious tributes to the divinity of Christ. Suppose, for an instant, all other praises silenced ; the worshipping voices that proclaim His divinity—Te deums, anthems, hymns —suppose them all hushed ; and before their echoes die, another song, fraught with a deeper

adoration, comes rolling up. The poor and needy, the sick and hungry and sorrowful, men and women and children of different periods, countries, creeds, are blessing Jesus for bread, for shelter, for clothes, for fire, for medicine, for consolation, for a thousand comforts sorely, sorely needed. Listen to the thunder of that thanksgiving, and while you listen ponder the question—*Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

II. The second sign of divinity adduced by our blessed Lord, was the fact that *the poor had the Gospel preached unto them*. Here I must speak very briefly. In Judea, as in other countries, the higher truths of religion, involved in those learned mists where pedants love to grope, had gradually been hidden from the common people. Christ spake, and at His words the mists fled away; and the old truths stood out again, clear and grand, like the mountains and stars. To rescue religion from philosophers and pedants, and place it within reach of simple souls, was in Christ's view a God-

like achievement. The thought seems to have kept floating in His mind; for some time after the Baptist's messengers had departed He broke out in those tender and solemn words, *I thank thee, Oh Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

Not then, nor in Judea alone, but in all other regions, and periods, Christ's has been a Gospel for artless, untaught minds. Who can estimate the blessings it has wrought by this peculiar function? The better kinds of merely human religions are always more intellectual than spiritual, and quite elude the comprehension of the vulgar. Such religions but coldly sustain a poor vitality, even in philosophic minds; they consign the untutored masses to superstition or passion. A Plato or a Zeno might arduously guide a few indefatigable spirits up to virtue; but the vast procession of humanity marched regardless on the road of sin. The Academy and the Porch, for all their splendour

of speculation or vigour of will, stood helplessly looking at the downward sweep of a world led captive by the devil at his will. But the deep, lucid teaching of our Lord Jesus, the story of His love and sorrows, repeated from generation to generation with wonder and tears, struck such tender chords in the heart of humanity that the wisest listened with delight, and the poorest whispered gratefully that they understood the strain. *The poor have the Gospel preached unto them;* and its music heard in this low world of sin, far away, yet clear and sweet, has drawn myriads of lowly men and women up to heaven, each in some sort with good and holy deeds echoing back the strains he heard, until, rising high and higher, his solitary song swelled and sank into the many-toned anthem of the skies.

These two signs, then—that He was a minister to the bodily wants of mankind, and that He was Saviour and Teacher of the poor—were Christ's own chosen proofs of his Messiahship. He added

one weighty sentence : *Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

Blessed, said Christ, blessed are they who instinctively recognize the divinity of My work ; to whom its lowliness and simplicity are its chief charm ; who, not *without* reason, but swayed by the logic of a clean conscience and holy affections, confess that I am *He that should come.*

It is possible to be offended in Christ—offended by this very lowliness and simplicity—so as to shrink from Him doubtfully, while germs of a saving trust are lying in the heart. Doubt *may* be factor of faith. Hands once wrung in an agony of scepticism may afterwards cast the crown in uttermost adoration at the Saviour's feet.

Still, *Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* To win the victory of faith on a moral, not on a mental ground, this—I say it soberly—is man's highest destiny. Never to question Jesus—to trust Him because He is the *felt* Redeemer and Purifier of the soul ; there is no experience happy like this. Amidst the feverish restlessness.

of modern thought, cool as dew, this benediction still descends on some faithful souls. Blessed, indeed, are they! It is well for those who after long wandering in the scorched desert make their way, footsore and thirsty, into the happy land at last; but it is far better for those who are carried in the arms of Jesus, beside green pastures and still waters, out to their eternity of peace.

Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? The question has a strange fitness in the times in which we live. Every day, almost, we are told that ours is an age of change. We are told that the political framework of society is so strained and tried by the pressure of new thoughts and forces that signs of dissolution appear on all sides. We are told that, in religious thought, plainly felt vibrations foretell some earthquake shock which is to break up the old order. In heathendom the rapid spread of European customs, literature, science, is fast scattering ancient beliefs; and the better sort of educated pagans, driven by

advancing knowledge from one superstition after another, are taking refuge, as in a last citadel, in a pure deism. In Christendom, from whatever causes, there is an increasing feeling of insecurity as to old theories and opinions, a loosening of belief; and yet there is no extensive movement aimed at any new doctrine or faith, only an uneasy swaying of thought this way and that. Still one notable effort to direct this wavering force is being made. The professors of natural science are silently knitting themselves into a new priesthood—a priesthood which, like its predecessors, holds the keys of knowledge. Every teaching, except their own, is illusion. The Gospel of Love and Faith, they tell us, must make way for a gospel of scalpel and microscope; the heaven of saints and martyrs is to vanish, replaced by a paradise of skilfully-contrived earthly comfort, where the disciples of science will learn how to make the most of their threescore years and ten. This is not the only evil besetting us. “The world” and “the Church” are both diseased. “The world” is tainted with that most deadly of

all moral maladies—"the spirit that sneers and disbelieves, the spirit of frivolity and indifference, of heartless irony, and jaded discontent, of giggling merriment and languid sensuality." "The Church" is distracted with internal conflicts, positively amazing for their variety, bitterness, and flippancy—as if the hour of gravest peril must be the chosen hour for fiercest inward strife. Altogether the aspect of the civilized world is portentous; yet we know nothing certainly: all this may be but the shadow of a flying cloud, or it *may* be the darkness that heralds the storm. But that storm, if it break in fury, shall end in stillness and peace. The Divine purpose holds on its way, even when to human eyes it seems sliding into failure. We do not, then, *look for another*, but we look for the same Lord, more gloriously manifested, more truly known, more widely worshipped. Let the gloom around blacken into any darkness—it cannot make us afraid; for, standing on the clear summit of prophecy, Faith, like the Apocalyptic Seer, describes

beyond the clouds of years, or centuries, the city of God lying far away—and the throne of the Lamb shall be in it.





WISDOM IN SIMPLICITY.

"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."—Luke x. 21.



HE blessed Lord did not mean that wisdom and prudence are hostile to Revelation. These words do not countenance the melancholy delusion that between earthly and heavenly knowledge there is a deadly enmity. They do not even insinuate that any latent animosity mars the concord of truth with truth. No thought like this troubled Him to Whom the secret of the universe was known ; Who knew that one God made earth

and heaven; that matter and spirit sprang from one creating hand. In the whole wide region of fact which the busy mind explores, there can be nothing really contradictory. All truths, of whatever kind, historical, scientific, metaphysical, sacred, are knit together in a loving unity—all co-operate in guiding the wandering steps of man into the path of light and peace.

Still, it is evident that our blessed Lord here denies that earthly wisdom has any faculty for discovering spiritual truth. The student's lore and the sage's cogitations cannot reveal the kingdom of heaven. Some men imagine that because they are fluent linguists, skilled reasoners, profound mathematicians, the gate of the temple of spiritual truth, where others timidly knock, and patiently wait, will be flung open wide to give them ready entrance. Christ declares that in that temple the wise and the foolish stand almost upon a level. The simpler feelings of our nature, unschooled by art or thought, a few broad and obvious facts and doctrines which almost every man knows—these

are the basis of the Christian creed. The peasant may ground his belief on foundations as firm as any philosopher can lay. Men of learning too often persist in thinking that their refined and all embracing wisdom makes them the only competent critics of religion. This is the reason why the wise and prudent cannot see things which are revealed unto babes. The pygmy of the earth, elated with his mite of knowledge, thinks it intolerable that he should be placed on a level with the mass of mankind. But the Saviour *rejoiced* at the thought. Rapture thrilled His heart as He reflected that His system was adapted to the poor and ignorant. Here we find our Redeemer wearing a glory no human philosopher ever wore. Other teachers made it a boast that their systems were beyond vulgar capacities, incomprehensible to all but keen and practised intellects. The great Plato wrote over the door of his academy, *Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here.* Others demanded, as preliminaries to a full and correct apprehension of their doctrines, patient study and various knowledge.

They prided themselves on being above the vulgar crowd. But the vulgar crowd was dear to Jesus. It was the vulgar crowd He came to seek and to save. Little children, unlettered peasants, beggars in their tattered raiment, average men and women who had neither fine aspirations nor scholastic thoughts—for such as these the Saviour was going to die. So He rejoiced to think that His Gospel was a plain matter. Was ever joy so pure, so magnanimous, so sublime ?

A man of plain understanding and narrow education, with the world before him, and the Bible in his hand, can frame a rational system of theology, and find his way to heaven. This is the statement we now proceed to illustrate.

I. The primary fact of religion is the existence of God. In a thousand ways nature bears witness to this great fact. With a voice distinct to the lowliest intelligence she proclaims One who was before all things and who 'created all things. She echoes clearly the words of Revelation,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. It does not need telescope or microscope to discover proofs of Deity. A thoughtful ploughman, or mechanic, can, with a little thinking, frame a natural theology, as sound as the largest learning can produce. The manifest fact that this is a world of Order and Design declares that there is a Creator. Whenever, for example, the rustic sees the falling rain revive the parched grass, the reflection is obvious that there must be an Intelligent Being who first of all endued the rain with its nourishing properties, and then arranged that it should come down from the sky and water the earth. As often as the busy mechanic sees the furnace glowing with fires which melt the stubborn iron into a ductile substance, he is led in the most natural way to ask, what wisdom contrived that heat should soften iron? what foresight stored the rich earth with ore and fuel ages before man came upon the scene at all? I shall not weary you with illustrations. Every time our senses come into play we accumulate new

proofs of the existence of God. The course of nature and of human affairs give the same testimony. The sun rises and shines upon all the earth, and every object upon which it sheds its light is visibly stamped with Divine wisdom. Night, with its hush and darkness, alters but does not end the argument, for now the sky is thronged with shining hosts that sing glory to God in the highest. The darkness shineth as the light. The stillness is eloquent of Deity.

“ What, though in solemn silence, all
“ Move round this dark terrestrial ball ;
“ What though no real voice nor sound,
“ Amid their radiant orbs be found ?
“ In Reason’s ear they all rejoice,
“ And utter forth a glorious voice ;
“ For ever singing, as they shine
“ The hand that made us is Divine.”

II. The doctrine of Divine Providence is next in importance to that of the existence of God ; and may with almost equal clearness be demonstrated to simple narrow intellects.

There is one volume which the unlettered peruse

H

with enforced attention. One study rivets the most volatile mind. That one volume which every man reads is his own heart. That one study which every man pursues is his own life. Now, no line of thinking leads so directly to the doctrine of Divine Providence as this universal pursuit. We soon discover that there is a Hand over us guiding our steps, shaping our destinies. We survey our past. Prosperity and adversity, now a thwarted, now a favoured scheme, good and bad actions, are all worked into a varied landscape. Yet through it all the river of existence has run on in one direction. Life has not been at all what we wished, hoped, projected ; *our* purpose has been frustrated but as we gaze our wondering eyes discover *another* purpose, mysterious, half-unknown, which has been all along secretly working towards completion. Our very blunders and failures, by a masterly power, have been forced to forward this design. The observation of facts like these caused Shakespere to say—

“ Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well

“ When our dear plots do pall, and that should teach us

“ There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
“ Rough-hew them how we will.”

The study of human life and the human heart led the great Poet to believe in Providence ; it has led numbers of men, inferior in intellect, to that belief ; and as this study is pursued more or less earnestly by every man, the doctrine it establishes cannot be difficult or obscure. The most artless meditations on the course of existence shape themselves almost spontaneously into the conviction that God guides the affairs of men ; and thus that momentous doctrine is *revealed unto babes.*

III. Another essential doctrine of religion is the Immortality of Man. Neither nature nor human life *prove* this truth, but they give intimations of it ; and these intimations are as distinct to poorly taught men as to the most cultivated and sagacious.

That it requires neither wide observation nor penetrating enquiry to give a glimmering notion of a future life, is proved by the fact that tribes

of savages, infantine in intellect, with scarcely a shred of literature or science, have given to Immortality a prominent place in their rude and scanty creeds. For, take the survey of human life where you will—at the highest point of civilization or the lowest deep of barbarism—it is always more or less dissatisfying. Virtues are unrewarded; crimes are unpunished. Sometimes the worst sinners, from the midst of tranquillity and enjoyment, see shadow and storm tracking good and noble beings from the cradle to the grave. Probably this startling contrast was the first thing to

— point out a hereafter
And intimate eternity to man.

This, indeed, is the strongest presumption of immortality which nature gives; and, observe, that the simplest understanding can appreciate it. The moral world, contrasted with the material world, presents a disheartening spectacle. You cannot sin against the laws of the material world without paying a penalty. If a man neglects to sow he will have

no harvest. If he disregards rules of living, diet, exercise, temperance, he will have a weak and sickly frame. In fact the laws of the material world are inexorable : disobey them and they visit you with punishment. Now in the moral world it is not so. The plainest rules of morality are often violated with impunity, or obeyed in vain. A *prudent* sensualist, by a little caution in his pleasures, may gratify every base desire and yet avoid disgrace and disaster. A usurer, by the most shameless and cruel extortion, will amass wealth.

On the other hand frail and suffering health is often allotted to men of spotless character. Men of rigid integrity and large benevolence often go stumbling from one misfortune to another down to a grave of sorrow and neglect. Sights like these are common and few can survey them undisturbed. The question soon arises, Does God care more for the laws of the lower creation than for those of the higher ? He will not tolerate the slightest infraction of *those* ; are *these* poor pliant things which any low caution or cunning can bend to its

own purpose ? From the perplexing spectacles of life and affairs men turned their gaze upon the grave and its dark beyond. But there clouds and darkness rolled and intercepted their eager scrutiny. Yet, even in that obscurity, imagination could discover shadowy outlines of another kingdom ; and hope began to breathe anew at the thought that perhaps *there* the wrong and injustice of earth might be reversed. Thoughts like these are not too great for simple minds ; and thus this doctrine of immortality, so far as it is by nature clear to men at all, is *revealed unto babes*.

I have hitherto mentioned doctrines of natural religion, so to speak. When we advance to Revelation we find that it too is clear, comprehensible, and that it appeals to plain and ordinary proofs.

Suppose now that a man of average mental powers and imperfect education takes up the New Testament to learn the way of salvation. He may naturally ask, especially in days of distrust and unbelief, Is this book really trustworthy ? Can he

answer that question ? His own knowledge is scanty : he is not competent to thread the mazes of theological argument : can he unassisted draw from the New Testament itself satisfactory evidence that it is true ? I believe he can. Suppose him, farther, to have perused carefully the Gospels and Epistles. After the perusal all his enquiries concerning the truth of these writings are fused into one weighty issue. Either the Epistles and Gospels were written, as for the most part they profess to be, by eye-witnesses of our Saviour's career, or they were written by deceptive persons, not eye-witnesses who assumed a disguise. Now consider that issue. Take for example, St. John's Gospel, St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, and St. Peter's First Epistle to the Churches. Here are three documents all professedly written by men who had a personal or direct knowledge* of the truth of the Gospel. Either the documents were thus written or they are the productions of

* St. John xxi. 23 24. 1 Cor. xv. 1—8. 1 Peter v. 1.

deceivers and forgers.* From this dilemma there is no possible escape. Could, then, these documents have been written by deceivers and forgers ? The supposition is intolerable. We judge a man honest whose face is frank, whose conversation is elevated, whose doctrines are pure and ennobling. A similar rule may be applied to literary compositions. Now, frankness of feeling, artlessness of narration, calmness of manner, benevolence of purpose, appear in all these writings. Can forgers assume all this at will ? More than this. These writings are full of zeal for truth, hatred of falsehood, intense desire for the moral welfare of man-

* I am aware of the distinction sometimes drawn between ancient and modern morality, with the design of invalidating this argument. Long ago, we are told, it was not deemed immoral for a writer to assume a fictitious character. Consequently the reasoning in the text would be set aside as unscholarly and unscientific, from a critical point of view ; none the less, however, do I believe the argument to be sound ; and the reply to be only a dexterous movement to evade it.

(After I had written this note, and, while the volume was passing through the press, I lighted on the following statement from the writings of Dr. Strauss :—“The narratives of the

kind: would forgers be at pains to palm off on the world compositions which brand themselves and their doings with infamy? Besides these writings are signal for serenity, eloquence, enthusiasm. Read St. John's Gospel: what artlessness in the story! what love of truth in the thoughts! How quietly the narrative flows on—

‘In its simplicity sublime.’

Did a wilful deceiver pen these beautiful lines? Read St. Peter's Epistle:—this passion, this tenderness, this language breathing everywhere sincerity, devotion, affection—was it all worked up by a forger? Read St. Paul's treatise on the Resurrection:—this bold, broad statement, this

Fourth Gospel, especially, are for the most part so methodically framed, so carried out into detail that, *if they are not historical, they can apparently only be considered as conscious and intentional fictions.*”—New ‘Leben Jesu,’ p. 208, the italics are mine.

If the Father of the mythical theory of gospel history, after thirty years' critical meditation thereon, makes such an admission, the statements of the text can scarcely be charged with exaggeration. The solidity and acuteness of the replies of orthodoxy to Strauss' subtle scheme are tacitly confessed in this paragraph. To have driven so wily a foe upon so formidable a dilemma is no small triumph).

fearless appeal to living witnesses, this honest, exact reasoning, this closing rapture of triumphant faith which soars above the terrors of death—are these all counterfeits? These writings “*ring with truth.*” Deceivers never could have written them. Any plain unsophisticated man reading the Gospels and Epistles will be thoroughly convinced that they are written by sincere, upright men who, in their heart of hearts, believed what they wrote. And St. Peter and St. John were *eye witnesses* of our Lord’s life, St. Paul was in constant communication with numbers of *eye witnesses*—could testimony be more solid? Accordingly, when the humble enquirer finds the beloved disciple saying repeatedly* of his gospel that he *knows* it to be true; when he finds the earnest St. Peter sending to the Churches an epistle which celebrates all the chief events of Christ’s life—His sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension; when he finds St. Paul strong and quick of

* Chapters xix. 35, xxi. 24.

intellect, and fiery in his zeal, gathering around Christ's empty grave a crowd of witnesses to the Resurrection, who had all seen the risen Lord ; —after this, I say, the enquirer most reasonably concludes that the writings are true, sacred, divine ; and thenceforth those pages are invested with an awful sanctity, and the voice that sounds along them is to him the very Voice of God.

In conclusion, observe how Revelation enlarges the capacities, dilates the conceptions, elevates the feelings and guides the actions of those who, apart from Revelation, are not remarkable for power of mind or breadth of education. With this Book in their hands—experience proves it true—men are possessed of the most magnificent thoughts. Science has marvellous secrets, philosophy has majestic truths, but Revelation surpasses both. The poor unlettered Christian has but to open the pages of his Bible, and, in an instant, he is translated to heights where human intellect unaided never soared. He has

but to open his Bible and secrets are disclosed to him such as have not entered into the heart of man. Revelation leads him to the verge of the river of death, and at her word the heavy curtain of clouds rolls upwards, and there breaks upon the view the farther shore—golden, calm, fair beyond all dreams of beauty. The kingdoms of eternity are stretched out before his eyes. He sees the multitudes of the redeemed in their snowy vesture, and across the leaden waters he almost can catch faint murmurs of their distant song. While he gazes entranced, Revelation bends and whispers in his ears, “ You, too, are immortal. The Father is ready to make you meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” This man may be poor, illiterate, lowly in birth, and meagre in intellect, but after such a disclosure of human destiny his ideas can never again be wholly insignificant. That glimpse of immortality has ennobled him; and now his bosom swells with conscious greatness. Still he is guarded from

any undue elation, for Revelation tells him that he is a sinner, weak, base, guilty. His purest affections are tinctured with selfishness; his finest aspirations are soiled with meanness. Impure passions, revengeful feelings, falsehood, unkindness, abject vanity, are all native to his heart. In the midst of this spectacle of gloom and misery Revelation places the true ideal of humanity—the Man Christ Jesus. Across that divine face no shade of evil passion ever swept; in that sacred heart there never beat a bad desire. Holy, harmless, undefiled, He lived among men, and the one motive for His every thought and deed was the happiness of man and the glory of God. The humblest mind, that forms a just conception of this Character, nurses from that hour a germ of greatness. It may be a peasant following a plough, a menial tasked with servile drudgery. Still eternity will not exhaust the feelings which now begin to stir in that lowly heart. Philosophers are wrangling about virtue:—Is there such a thing? What

is it ? Whence comes it ? The simple Christian has caught a glimpse of Incarnate Holiness, and has perceived, even in his transports of adoration, that the virtues of Christ, His love, courage, truth, are not mere ethereal excellences but practical human qualities to be imitated as well as admired. Révélation assures him that even the sublimest acts of the Son of Man are left to us for an example. Amazing, ennobling thought ! Whoever has grasped it is thenceforth secure from complete degradation. A realization of the grand capacities, which lie hidden in His nature, will give him a dignity of feeling which nothing can lower, and a nobility of purpose which nothing can demean. But he is not left in possession of mere speculative notions however exalted. He is taught how sin may be washed away, for Revelation takes him to the Cross of Christ, and, pointing to the dying Saviour cries, *The chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and with His stripes we are healed.* He is taught how personal holiness

may be obtainned by believing prayer : *If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ?* In short, Revelation, both unfolds before the mind of her meanest disciple conceptions of illimitable grandeur, and also furnishes him with whatever instruction is needed for growth in grace. He is made wiser than all the philosophers—wise unto salvation. He is made influential for good ; those who observe his ways revere and love the humble Christian man, and his pious life helps one to a truer notion of godly living, or braces another to a firmer performance of duty. Still he is a simple man, his thoughts common-place, his station obscure, his education imperfect. But beneath that unpretending exterior an eternal existence is slowly ripening. The world knows nothing of it. Honours are lavished on those who master a science or learn a language. Enthusiastic plaudits are showered on poets and orators. The students of art and litera-

ture rise to renown and reward. Modestly that Christian life runs on to its close. The twilight of existence comes ; the evening shadows deepen ; the night of eternity is near. Yet of all the world's famed children none shew so grandly as he in this last hour. Still Revelation is at his side, and in the gathering darkness he hears the sweet and solemn voice, *Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.* Out into eternity he goes, but with such confidence and peace that "they who have seen his look in death no more may fear to die." He goes into eternity—but now the confines of our observation are reached. On that journey to the invisible world we cannot follow the disembodied spirit. The scenes, the experiences, the thronging sensations that rush upon it—these we can neither describe nor know. But of this we are assured : poverty, lowliness, ignorance, no more mark him for neglect or scorn. Of all idle sounds, in this region of reality, the idlest are words like "lofty birth," "polished manners," "ample learning." The

humble Christian is in a kingdom where One, who once was poor, unlettered, and obscure, reigns in a royalty of inexpressible power and splendour. The destiny of the Saviour will be the destiny of the saint ; and surely it is enough for the disciple that he be as his Lord.

One word more. I have spoken of the simplicity of Christianity and the blessed Book which reveals it. It is surely a delightful reflection that, without either laborious education or extraordinary capacity, men and women can find their way to heaven. It is surely the rarest perfection of the Bible that it is the poor man's book. For all this let us thank the Lord of heaven and earth. But remember, simple as the Bible is, no one understands it without the help of the Holy Spirit. That I firmly believe. Nay, I firmly believe that until we are really converted, a full understanding of the Bible and a rational faith in Christianity, are alike impossible. Study the Scriptures then with daily and earnest prayer for Divine guidance. Here is the wonder of the Bible. It is a simple book, but

without prayer the most acute and soaring intellect will find it a puzzle or an infinite difficulty. Oh, for humility to discern our own blindness ! Oh, for grace to seek the illumination of the Spirit of God !

“ Expand Thy wings, celestial Dove,
Brood o'er our nature's night,
On our disordered spirits move,
And let there now be light.”





THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."—Acts xx. 35.

 T is strange that an aphorism which seems to gather into the focus of a few words those rays of Gospel truth which, diffused, illuminate an entire dispensation, should have been omitted by every one of the Evangelists. Yet it was omitted. To St. Paul we owe it, and to that tender parting scene at Miletus, that this little priceless sentence has not wholly passed from the memory of man, and slipped away into oblivion.

I call it a priceless sentence; yet I do not mean

to say that, were it the placid dictum of a professional moralist, who merely laid down principles of duty, and assigned to others the meaner task of acting them out, the sentiment alone would have any rare value. It is easy from a stored and skilful brain to fabricate a proverbial morality which shall be beautiful to the eye and worthless to the heart. A secret suspicion of this troubles most of us. We are not satisfied until we know whether the preacher practises or not. We look for men strong in deeds as well as wise in words. We want a teacher who has tempered his precepts in the fire of his own experience. Without some such preparation, any maxim of conduct, however fine as a specimen of intellectual workmanship, will prove a brittle weapon in the hands of virtue as, girt with enemies, she goes fighting up duty's difficult ways.

But this test, which discovers the weakness of many a showy sentiment, reveals the strength and force of this rule from Christ. Would we know with what sincerity, what intense conviction

these words were uttered by our Redeemer, we should take them to the foot of His cross, and muse upon them there. *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* Lo ! the sacred head is drooping. The light fades from the benignant eyes. The last cry of pain and prayer has writhed from between the ashen lips. He lays down His life for the sheep. Surely He at least meant what He said when He declared, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

We dare not attempt to draw aside the veil of mystery which overhangs our Redeemer's dying sorrows. The sweat like unto blood in the garden, the cry bitter as death from the cross, these are signs of some sublime and lonely agony whose depths we may not explore. Yet, the question will come, "Did He feel it more blessed to give than to receive *then?*" Was it more blessed to moan amidst the shadows of Gethsemane than to ride into Jerusalem amidst waving palms and shouts of Hosanna ? Was it more blessed to hang on that accursed tree than to stand on the

mountain-top, bright with transfiguration glory ? It *was* more blessed. Yes, we are sure that even when that supreme agony bowed Him, as the stormy rushing wind might bow a solitary reed, fixed in the roots of His being, unconquered by suffering, there was a trust, a hope, a patient indomitable reliance in which He was unutterably blessed.

It is more blessed to give than to receive. Our text, you observe, contains a comparison. It assumes that there is a blessedness in receiving, and then asserts that there is a higher blessedness in giving. In our treatment of the text we shall adhere to this method of comparison.

I. *It is blessed to receive.*

There are many of God's gifts which yield to each recipient a joy untainted by any mixture of sinful selfishness. Gifts such as these it is blessed to receive. It is blessed to receive the natural life which animates and sustains our bodies. In health we scarcely understand this ; but look at yonder

invalid, whom the skilled physician has led back from the grave's extremest brink ; and who now, wasted and weakened, yet mending, is reclining on the sea-shore, as though waiting like one of old for some angel to move the waters that they heal. He drinks in each breath eagerly like some rare elixir ; and the rose of dawning health tints the thin cheek, and the eyes kindle, and as returning strength flows down the enfeebled frame the whole spirit seems to bathe in quiet bliss. It is the blessedness of receiving *life*. Rising from mere animal to intellectual existence we find that there is blessedness in receiving *truth*. The love of knowledge, for its own sake, and wholly apart from any benefit which may accrue from its possession, is a passion from which scarcely any man can boast entire exemption. From the gratification of this passion there springs a pure exalted pleasure. Every man at some time or other at least *tastes* this pleasure. But sometimes a gifted and laborious thinker, who has long been wandering in the maze of some perplexed problem, and is

ready to abandon his pursuit in despair, suddenly finds his mind lit, as it were, by a flash of inspiration which runs all along his scattered and disjointed thoughts, reveals their sweet unity, throws them into form and order, and so shows him in an instant the truth he long had sought in vain. Now, at a time like this, and in such a mind, there is a lofty joy which makes any mere bodily pleasure seem flat and insipid : it is the blessedness of receiving *truth*. Yet, even this is an inferior happiness. In receiving *affection* man finds a blessedness above every other human joy. Nothing in life is so bright that love cannot shed over it a richer glow, nothing so dark that love cannot pierce it with some ray of comfort. Nay, sorrow seems to impart to affection a subtle bliss which it loses in happier hours. It is blessed to receive affection when we are happy, but can words describe the blessedness of receiving it when we are grieved or suffering ? Let the wasted child of sickness, whose hours of pain have been cheered by some loving presence, tell

what rapture was in those thrills of gratitude which so often suffused the sunk eyes with tears, and made the pale lips tremble with scarcely uttered blessings, and you may guess — you may faintly guess — the blessedness of receiving affection.

Life, Truth, Love,—it is blessed to receive these; but to receive the heavenly gift of Life Eternal is an exceeding happiness. See yonder sinner long a prodigal from God, moaning in loneliness and hunger of the heart, dejected, hopeless. So soon as the resolve flashes across His mind, *I will arise and go to my Father*, the spring of a new secret joy is unsealed within him; and oh! when he feels himself forgiven; when, palpable as a Father's embrace, the love and peace of God enfold him; then in that high hour, that real birthday of the soul, the recipient of eternal life, God's best gift, feels that, indeed, it is blessed to receive.

Still, the Lord Jesus said, *It is more blessed to give.* Well He knew the human heart and all

its capacities ; and He it is who tells us that there is a blessedness deeper than when life's returning tide sets through the exhausted frame ; deeper than when the dawn of truth breaks on the thinker's weary vigil ; deeper than when love with tender ministries turns sorrow into joy ; aye, deeper than when the ray of God's peace weaves the penitent's tears into a bow of promise and hope. *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

Blessed—blessed—the word falls on our ears with a certain strangeness. Why does not Christ say, “ It is *happier* to give than to receive.” Or rather, (for the original word means ‘ happy’ as well as ‘ blessed’) how is the preference for the latter signification to be justified ?

The answer is important. In the human view of life happiness appears as “ our being’s end and aim,” but in Christ’s view of life *blessedness* is disclosed as man’s real destiny. Our Saviour says little about mere felicity either here or hereafter. Those metaphors which we love to incorporate with

our notions of Heaven, trees that never wither, streams of running crystal, streets of gold, gates of pearl, friendships reunited beneath skies where no shadows sweep, we learned not from His lips. Love, duty, purity, trust—of these He chiefly speaks, colouring His teaching with no glowing pictures, but satisfied with these clear and quiet lights. As we grow in grace we love this view of heaven best of all. The vision of faith becomes clearer and we see, beyond and above the heaven of happiness, the heaven of blessedness. The old querulous call for rest, mere sinlessness, and re-united affections, slowly rises into a passionate cry for a heaven of service and conquest. We do not want the less joy, peace, the holy companionships, or to find as angels those we lost as men; but more we want to know the power of our Master's resurrection, to spurn baseness, to conquer luxuriosness, to be ready if God wills it to toil with cut, bleeding feet up any flinty path of enterprise, to plunge into depths of misery that we may raise the fallen or bind the broken heart. To labour—not

to rest, to serve—not to rule, to give—not to receive—that is our highest conception of eternal bliss; and when we have slowly climbed to this conception we stand, as upon some clear summit of aspiration; and immortality spreads above, serene and boundless, a sky which, above all possible heights of achievement, still expands its distant and infinite arch.

Bearing in mind this distinction between blessedness and happiness we are to ask.

II. *Why it is more blessed to give than to receive?*

It is more blessed because in giving we are copying God.

Without irreverence or rashness we may say, I think, that God finds pleasure in giving. He might have reigned for ever, we imagine, in solitude; and creation is a sign that He finds happiness in sharing existence with conscious and intelligent beings. Then not only has He made the world, and peopled it, but how lavishly He has en-

dowed it with enjoyment ! Each pleasure of life is an evidence that God loves *to give*. All glories of scenery, the sounds that delight the ear, human beauty, the thousand happy relationships of life, accumulate proof that God loves giving for giving's sake. Now, we were made in God's image ; and in restoring to our souls that half vanished resemblance we find the highest blessedness. To give, then, is blessed because God is a Giver. To part with something of your own, that another may be benefited, is a God-like act. It elevates you in the scale of existence. You become, as it were, a creator. You call a happiness into being. Though it be only an alms given to a needy person, or a smile kindly meant to cheer a sorrowing heart, somehow the act thrills you with a high and quiet pleasure far different from any paltry self-complacency. A flash of Deity for an instant lights your being up, and you feel that '*it is more blessed to give than to receive.*'

It is more blessed because in giving we find an intimation of our immortality.

To every man who is devout and thoughtful *his own existence* sometimes wears the aspect of a mysterious, insoluble problem. The devotion of such a man will furnish him with a lofty conception of life, of its glorious possibilities of duty and destiny. But often while devotion with enraptured contemplation surveys the fair prospect of life brightening on into eternal glory, cold worldly reason will steal up and whisper, "Is it more than a beautiful vision"? The trouble is that devotion cannot answer that question in the dry, cynical tone in which it is asked. Devotion cannot condense its glowing fancies into a syllogism. Consequently in some devout and thoughtful minds an interminable controversy goes on between the devotion and the thoughtfulness; and in this controversy giving is a valuable, almost a decisive agent. For self-sacrifice invigorates all the spiritual faculties. Often when we are doing deeds of mercy and love our whole immortality, beclouded at other times, lies before us clear and fair. Life is seldom a problem when we are busy

in the service of Christ. Assuredly many a struggling Christian soul, long beset with doubts, not to be slain by reason or shaken off by effort of will, has found as he steadily pursued some path of holy benevolence, that the doubts dogging him dropped off one by one ; and, conscious of security lightly won, he has confessed that *it is more blessed to give than to receive.*

It is more blessed because in giving we learn the true source of peace.

The experience of every Christian heart, is that faithful imitation of the self-surrender of Christ makes life tranquil. I might appeal to far other witnesses, for the most worldly confess that the life of receiving is anxious, toilsome, feverish, and the life of giving fresh and serene. A great English poet of the last century drew a beautiful picture of a quiet happy life. But he did not depict anything wealthy, fashionable or renowned. No ; in a modest mansion dwelt the man

“To all the country dear
“And passing rich with forty pounds a-year.”

You know the exquisite description of that course of quiet charity. Nothing in all the poem, however, is so interesting to the Christian reader as the noble lines in which the poet declares that this simple village was grand in its simplicity :—

“ Like some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
“ Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
“ Though round its breast the rolling clouds be spread,
“ Eternal sunshine settles on its head.”

If a writer free from the dictation of religious profession could so describe charity, surely the voice of Christian experience will be listened to when it declares that the deepest peace is to be found in giving. I do not mean giving so many pounds in the year, or so much work or influence—though these stray acts are not done without responsive gushes of happiness—but giving the entire being to the service of Christ. Once make *that* surrender—once resolve to live unreservedly to Him who loved you and gave Himself for you, and then indeed your peace will “flow as a river.” There is no need in making this absolute surrender

“ To bid for cloistered cell,
“ Our neighbour and our work farewell.”

To the scrutiny of prayerful Christian watchfulness, the routine of business, the domestic hearth, the scene of pleasure, will discover numberless opportunities where self-sacrifice, giving of self, may not merely cheer some sorrowful heart, but better far convert some sinner from the error of his ways. Whoever sets before himself this object in life—by Christ Jesus to make men happier and better, *must* thenceforth secure peace of mind. Suppose the worst that can befall him, that his high designs are wholly baffled, still that sublime reflection, “I have failed *in God’s service*,” will hush all disquietude. A Christian can be calm in the face of such failure; but to *succeed*, to feel that by your exertion, hearts once heavy-laden are beating joyously, and hearts once polluted are growing wholesome—Oh ! he whose life is overshadowed with that consciousness will know in a way, words could never teach him, that ‘*it is more blessed to give than to receive*.’

Let me ask you in conclusion to look at two

K

passages from the Gospel story which illustrate two aspects of our subject—the blessedness of the life of giving—the cursedness of the life of mere receiving.

Hanging there lifeless, the very image of forsaken and hopeless misery, behold the body of the betrayer of Christ. Upon that man there opened a rare chance. He was one of the Saviour's chosen companions. All that example, high and tender, teaching wise and pure, could do for a man was done for Judas, done in vain. *It is more blessed to receive than to give* was the motto of his life; and he obeyed that rule to the uttermost—obeyed it until the fiend of selfish avarice entered his heart, with sevenfold strength, and enslaved him wholly. He sold his Lord. And the instant that final fatal act was committed the flame of his eternal torment began to burn; and maddened with remorse, like the scorpion in the ring of fire, he slew himself. He hangs there the dread emblem of all who live for self—who hold it more blessed to receive than to give—who serve their passions

not their God—who will have enjoyment even at the cost of the happiness, life, souls of others. No tears deplore his fate ; no pious care tends his cold clay ; he dies a dog's death ; from age to age he is remembered with execrations ; and scarcely rage itself will brand the vilest of the race with his accursed name.

Only turn your eyes and you behold another Form hanging lifeless—the Betrayed, not the betrayer—the Giver not the receiver. It is the Cross of Christ and He is dead. We gaze down the long avenue of history to that Cross and in successive vistas there meets our eyes scene after scene that awakens thoughts oh ! how different from those that other spectacle aroused. He is the great Exemplar of Sacrifice. And think—oh ! *think* what He has done—how for eighteen centuries His work and character have purified, ennobled and consoled families, kingdoms, solitary souls. Think how the happy have made the loftiest note of their thanksgivings His name—how mourners have ceased their weeping as they heard it—how

the dying just whispered it and passed peacefully away.

Judas or Christ—which shall be your exemplar ? Say not that you are secure from the awful degradation of the disciple, and incapable of the perfect goodness of the Master. Which *spirit* are you of ? Do you go along the ways of life, clutching greedily at wicked pleasures ? or selling the truth for worldly advantage ? or grinding the face of the poor ? But the supposition is too dreadful. Let me draw a brighter picture. At a far distance, penitently, humbly you are trying to follow Christ. You are trying—trying in the kindnesses of home, in the graceful courtesies of life abroad, in deeds of charity, known only to the recipients and to God, in consolations breathed in the ear of sorrow, in many ways, I trust, you are trying to give not to receive. Yes ; and were a voice given to your deepest feeling in your noblest hours it would say, “I want to give more and ever more, but this evil nature holds me down and keeps me back.” My brother come once again to this Cross of shame and

glory. Look on the Saviour Who loved you and gave Himself for you. In return for that Offering what will you give ? A tithe of your income ? A Sunday in each week ? A portion of your influence ? A share of your work ? Oh ! now a rush of feeling sweeps through you, carrying away your selfishness, enlarging your niggard ideas of duty, causing you to cry with unhesitating earnestness—

“ Were the whole realm of nature mine
“ That were an offering far too small,
“ Love so amazing, so divine,
“ Demands my life, my soul, my all.”





PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM.

“They stoned Stephen.”—Acts vii. 59.

“And Saul was consenting unto his death.”—Acts viii. 1.

 It seems strange enough that the birth of Christ and the death of St. Stephen are commemorated by the Church on successive days. Yesterday we watched and listened while the dark and silent sky, strangely brightened with angelic forms, echoed the happy song, *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.* To-day we gaze on the horrid scene where dragged or driven by a band of fiendish persecutors, St. Stephen is hurried to

his doom. Strange contrast ! The dying echoes of the angel's song are caught up and suddenly changed into cries of sanguinary hate. The angelic forms vanish from our view, replaced by the savage crew which gathers like a ring of demons round the expiring martyr. Possibly the *juxta-position* is accidental ; yet it is no fanciful lesson we learn from it. *On earth peace, good will toward men.* The promise is kept ; but Christ's blessings descend not like dew falling from quiet skies. His peace must come through strife. The *good will toward men*, like some rare metal, is sublimed in the furnace of rancour and persecution. *Amidst sorrow and sighing* is built up the golden city from which sorrow and sighing flee away. So heaven-taught faith startles not when the music of the angels becomes as it were a fitful cadence that sweetly sinks away, to rise again harsh and discordant. The wrath of man shall praise the Lord. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. We listen awhile, and these two dissonant sounds melt into one lofty strain ; and the burden is still,

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,
good will toward men.*

The circumstances which brought St. Stephen into prominence are familiar and can be hastily dismissed. Some dissension arose in the Church at Jerusalem, because it was supposed that in the daily ministration of charity the Grecian widows were neglected. The matter was laid before the Twelve Apostles, who were not long in adjusting the difficulty : *Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.* Of the seven men thus chosen St. Stephen was one —probably the chief. Starting as a deacon, he was not long, so conspicuous were his abilities, in advancing to the front of the Christian ranks. *Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.* His mental strength and skill were scarcely inferior to his spiritual gifts. In dispute with the Jewish opponents of the gospel he discovered himself

to be a master in the art of reasoning ; and they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Beaten in argument, his antagonists saw that they might crush the man where they could not vanquish the reasoner. They suborned false witnesses who charged St. Stephen with blasphemy ; and on this pretext they brought him before the council. The charge—like most charges forged by persecutors —was truth malignantly distorted. St. Stephen appears to have been almost first among the early Christians to perceive that Judaism, with all its ideas of favoured race and sacred locality, was effete. Its work was done. To cling blindly to a system which, however it had served the past, could not serve the future, was neither piety nor sense. But this theory, compatible with the utmost reverence, was readily manipulated into blasphemy by St. Stephen's enemies. He was charged with having spoken blasphemous words against Moses and against God. In repelling this accusation he gave an exposition of the Jewish history following a

method which was then entirely new, though destined afterwards to be pursued and developed by that very Saul of Tarsus who, unconscious of his future, was now persecuting the church of God. His judges listened patiently for a considerable time; but towards the close of his address something in their bearing, as it seems, roused the martyr to anger. He broke out in an invective as courageous as severe: *Ye stiffnecked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.* At this juncture the narrator informs us his enemies were *cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth.* But St. Stephen, entranced with his argument, scarcely saw how all round the cloud of faces was blackening. He closed his defence with what

might well have seemed to his audience and his judges a most marvellous stroke of oratory. Forgetting his danger, blind to the gathering fury of his foes, rapt in a divine enthusiasm, he looked up to Heaven, and that instant there burst on his vision Jesus, standing at the right hand of God. In an ecstasy he told his judges what he saw. But their rage had risen with his rapture. *They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord.* Then that wrathful crew seized the patient martyr, and bearing him, as it were on the crest of a foaming wave of wrath, cast him out to die.

Excepting the Crucifixion itself, history produces no grander contrast than we find in this martyrdom of St. Stephen. The climax of wicked passion and the saint's immovable repose, each heightens the effect of the other. We fancy the persecutors restless, wrathful, imprecating, as they complete their horrid work ; and we see the saintly figure beaten down, yet never struck from the attitude of rapture and prayer. *Lord Jesus, receive my*

spirit: here was the language of indomitable trust. *Lord lay not this sin to their charge*: here was the utterance of divinest forgiveness. Well, are we prepared for the beautiful touch that finishes the picture—*He fell asleep.*

Among many striking aspects of the short story of St. Stephen, none is more rich in instruction than the view it gives of religious persecution. Of this, as we shall see, it is, indeed, a study complete and unique.

It is needless to say that, as Christians, we hold all persecution to be evil. We do not stop here: We believe persecution to be destructive of the cause it is designed to serve. But this odious religious vice has played so important a part in history, has been the sin of so many and so various characters that, perhaps, on no subject is a hasty judgment more liable to be formed, or more strongly to be deprecated. Our age goes to the extreme of indifference. The direct consequence is, that, in self defence, it loudly denounces the

extreme of persecution. It is intolerant of intolerance; and can only express its condemnation of the bigotry of the past by becoming bigoted itself. To resist this temper, and yet not palliate wrong, is the condition, without which, a fair, broad study of our subject is impossible.

Let me observe, first of all, that toleration is not necessarily a virtue. Writers who hold all religions in equal contempt are fond of adducing, as a sign of their superior moral excellence, the statement that they abstain from all persecution. The unbeliever who will not persecute, contrasts himself with the believer who has persecuted, and is highly gratified. Upon this comparison I venture two remarks. I am not sure that unbelievers are so sinless in this matter as they imagine. One instance, only, I recollect when educated, intellectual scepticism had Christianity in its power; and history tells me that the Sadducee persecuted as cruelly and bitterly as the Pharisee. But pass that by. Admit that infidelity is guiltless of persecution; at best this is

no more than a crime avoided. It is not a virtue achieved. Men who hold all religious teaching to be visionary, who say of theology that rational minds might as well discuss the "politics of the moon," what thanks to these, if they are tolerant of error? Will any man burn another for a chimera?—torture him because he is the victim of an illusion? No: let the sceptic once show that he has some opinion which he loves better than life; let that opinion be imperilled by those whom he can persecute; *then* if he maintain his demeanour of toleration unruffled, he may fairly challenge comparison with Christian persecutors.

Persecution is a crime; but all persecution is not equally criminal. One of the finest offices of spiritual criticism is to distinguish the persecution which is utterly base, from that which, however grossly alloyed with evil, has in it an element of good. We are so habituated to detest this sin that we shrink from a judicial examination of it; fearing lest where we assume the functions of judge, by

hasty onlookers, we may be thought to do the work of a pleader.

There is a cruel, wicked persecution in which no scrutiny can discern one redeeming trait. Such persecution is generally wrought by men banded together in some corporation, the guilt being too atrocious, too poignant for one to bear alone. From the days of the Jewish Sanhedrim to those of the Romish Inquisition, the tragedy has been repeated over and over again, amidst different scenes and by infinite varieties of actors. But the grand plot has ever been the same. A doctrine, or group of doctrines, has grown venerable; and not only venerable, but, being in the form of religion, and woven into the texture of political, social, and domestic life, has become of the first importance. Of course there must be a company of priests sustaining these doctrines, and by these doctrines sustained. A Reformer rises up. He impugns some article of this faith. He challenges its authorized defenders to make their cause good, and vindicate their creed from his censure. He asks

nothing more than that the ground be cleared for a fair conflict of reason with reason. It is evident that highminded men, however disinclined for controversy, would feel it their duty to comply with his terms. The scholar, the reasoner, the orator would come forward and fight for their faith ; and though they might strain every nerve to conquer, no unchristian animosity would tempt them to win by foul play. But, to begin with, a genuine persecutor never is a man of faith. The bigot and the believer live at opposite poles of the religious sphere. The persecutor is afraid that his cause may be worsted in fair fight. Another method, more easy of access, appears to him a straighter road to safety. He has physical force on his side. The law is with him. The sceptre and the sword are at his service. So he surveys his antagonist and thinks, "Let me but shut him in the dungeon, let me but burn him in the fire, and I shall have little to fear from his logic or his enthusiasm." It only remains that the persecutor set his horrid machinery in motion, kindle the fires of vulgar

passion, heat up religious fury, and soon the merciless wheels of law crush the martyr ; and his enemies begin to breathe again. Another danger has been averted, and affairs will go on smoothly a little longer.

All this has been done in the name of Christ ; and opponents of the Gospel do not scruple to brand it for the crimes done in its name. But as Christian men, who feel a stain upon our Lord's character more keenly than a stain on our own, we solemnly declare that the worst blasphemy atheism ever penned or spoke, is not so dishonourable to Christ, so ruinous to Christianity, as this vindictive, hypocritical perversion of the gospel spirit.

Still the history of the Christian Church assures us that the persecutor and the saint are sometimes combined. It seems incomprehensible ; but the fact cannot be denied. Upon men whom we must admit to be sincere Christians the charge of persecution is indelibly fixed. Now on this aspect of

L

our subject the story of St. Stephen throws a special light. Among that bloodthirsty crowd which gathered round the dying martyr, there stood one at least who, mixed with the malice of persecution, had in his heart a confused purpose of right. This man *was consenting unto his death*; but something about St. Stephen, his courage, his ardour, his divine forgiveness, touched a responsive chord in the heart of Saul of Tarsus. After a short, stormy, interval, during which, defying the remonstrance of conscience, he pursued his path of violence, his internal struggles were so intensified by the vision of Christ that from destroyer he was almost instantaneously transformed into preacher of the faith. Later in life, when he knew by experience what persecution meant, St. Paul described his state before conversion. Never perhaps has a man dealt so fearlessly with his own experience. Here was no morbid fanatic bewailing a sinfulness he did not realize. There is manliness and common sense in his penitence. But he hides nothing, palliates nothing. He frequently re-

verts to the subject ; and in three remarkable utterances he gives us a complete picture of Saul the persecutor. Looking at his guilt as a whole, not waiting to discriminate between better and worse, he calls himself, with touching sincerity, the chief of sinners. But, again, reflecting the thought of calmer hours, he says that though he was a blasphemer and a persecutor, he obtained mercy, because he did it *ignorantly in unbelief*. Once more, when before King Agrippa, he makes a statement concerning himself, which possibly he never would have made had it not been serviceable to his argument : *I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*. Observe, St. Paul does not excuse himself in all this ; he simply says that his motives were not wholly depraved. His passionate and cruel zeal was guided by a purpose, and that purpose was the extirpation of error. Charity and sober judgment alike bid us suppose that wherever Christian men have been tempted into persecution, their state of mind has been similar to that of St.

Paul. Probably they reasoned with themselves in this way : " If civil crime, which only works temporary harm, be punished with bonds or death ; surely heresy, which may eternally ruin innumerable souls, deserves no lighter punishment." The reasoning is miserably fallacious ; the conduct to which it leads is cruel and wicked ; but even misguided sincerity may enable such persecutors, like their great prototype, to obtain mercy because they did it *ignorantly in unbelief*.

Let me ask, in conclusion, what are the effects of Persecution ? The immediate end it is designed to accomplish is generally attained ; for persecutors are too cunning and too cowardly to resort to physical force, unless certain that their weapon cannot be turned against themselves. So the visible triumph is usually on the side of wrong. But what are the ulterior results of Persecution ? In the case of those who make it the tool of their own cruelty and selfishness—who are at heart indifferent alike to truth and falsehood—the success

of their schemes makes them more hardened, more cruel, more impervious to goodness. Although they little dream it, for them prosperity is Heaven's severest punishment, for wrapt in selfish ease, haughty and impenitent, they go onward to their doom. Let them be. What, then, of those persecutors who, like St. Paul, have a zeal for God, however blind—men not essentially cruel and selfish? To these a time must come when clearer light thrown on their conduct will reveal its baseness; and then conscience, writhing under the lash of remorse, will learn with what stripes God can chasten His erring children. As to the martyrs, History and Revelation tell one story—an inalienable triumph is laid up for them—a triumph in earth and Heaven. History tells us that from the first, persecution has striven vainly to destroy the influence of the servants of the Truth. Scene after scene is shewn us where they contrived to make defeating circumstances the very factors of victory. One is led into the Hall of Justice; but as the Apostle reasons, his unquailing look makes the

Judge's gaze unsteady ; and the fear-smitten ruler is *almost persuaded* to be a Christian. Another is thrust into prison, loaded with chains and surrounded with guards ; but at midnight an angel, gliding from the skies, noiselessly strikes off the fetters, and leads him through the opening gates to freedom and grander undertakings. A third is dragged out to die ; but in the very moment when exulting persecution thinks its work complete, a look of love and faith, flickering in the expiring face, kindles in another heart an ardour which takes up the nearly vanquished cause and leads it on to new conquests. *One* is buried beneath a rock, and the tomb sealed and watched ; but soon with the strength of an earthquake He bursts His bonds and comes forth, terrible as lightning, and as swift to fly from land to land, binding round the world a zone of light. This History tells us ; and as she ceases to speak, Revelation takes up the story, and drawing aside the veil of death, shows us where the martyred servants of a martyred Lord enjoy immortal triumph. On a sea of glass mingled

with fire, stand them who have gotten the victory, having the harps of God. Emerged from all disaster, studying earth in the light of Heaven, discerning how the evil that seemed to prosper really failed, how the good that seemed to die, crushed beneath the feet of oppression, secretly survived, these exalted beings chant the solemn hymn, *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints.*





THOUGHTS ON THE SECOND ADVENT.

"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"—Luke xviii. 8.

HE thought once crossed my mind that, possibly in the divine order of things, a temporary decadence of Christianity may have been arranged; and that this enquiry of our Lord pointed to a time when, amidst the overflowing of iniquity, the Christian Church would altogether disappear.

The idea ushered in a train of strange and wonderful thoughts. A picture of the state of

things at that crisis rose before my mind. I fancied how some new system, artfully fitted to an immoral intellectualism, slowly, like a rising tide, crept its way among men. The divine philosophy of the Bible, yielding to the attacks and misrepresentations of numberless enemies, passed through downward stages of discredit, until it found itself at last an object of ridicule. The sublime morality of Christ, savagely attacked by those whose passions rebelled against its mandates, lost hold on the human conscience ; and the Cross, once the blessed symbol of saintly living, and a hope full of immortality, became a mere relic, handled curiously by antiquarians as they detailed the obsolete delusion which once made that relic significant. Even He Whose sacred name now thrills the noblest natures, was spoken of by some with derision, by some with contempt, and by the mass of men with indifference, as a Being whose influence had wholly died away. And ever while the Christian faith sank and decreased, the floods of ungodliness rose and spread with gathering fury. "Self" became the motive of

life. “Gratify yourself” became the golden rule inculcated on each succeeding generation with a more forcible incitement, and received with a greedier approval. Conjugal fidelity, domestic love, social virtue, national honour were all swept away. Dead and forgotten immoralities started up from graves where they had slept for centuries, and hurried to the carnival of crime. Society became a wild scene, where reckless ambition, insatiable avarice, and unbridled licentiousness lashed their votaries into an ever-increasing frenzy. So affairs ran on, going from bad to worse, until at last, as if in the mad climax of evil, when sin was at its height, suddenly the long-delayed hour of vengeance came and there appeared *the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven.*

Perhaps the text suggests ideas of this kind; but as it is, without question, a text *hard to be understood*, all explanations of its meaning should be cautiously given and cautiously received. It leads to a subject abounding with varieties and

contradictions of opinion; and the most I can safely do is to set before you a possible explanation, frankly admitting that it may not be the true one.

It appears to me, then, that our Lord here intimates that at His second coming a large part of Christendom will have relapsed into infidelity, and that in those last hours of gloom and storm even the faith of His elect will shed a small and tremulous ray. The apparent failure of Christianity will add force to the objections of infidelity, and cause doubt and fear and hopelessness to roll like heavy mists over the Church. The prevalence and seeming victory of evil will dishearten the righteous: *Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.* Then, Christ asks, in that solemn day, when the entire Christian system seems tottering into ruin, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find on the earth steady, persevering, prayerful faith—a purpose like that of the widow in the parable which no difficulties can daunt and no opposition reverse?

It is not at all improbable that at the time of

Christ's second coming, Christianity will appear to be a failure, *because vast tracts of the earth will still be enveloped in the darkness of Paganism.* The numerical state of our faith may then be pretty much as it is now. And when we remember that out of nearly thirteen hundred millions of human beings, there are only three hundred and fifty millions who believe in Christ, we can readily understand that a time may come when partial conquest may be set down as actual defeat. The abject Fetichism of savage tribes, moulded into various shapes of gross idolatry, holds nearly two hundred million souls in its degrading bondage. Brahminism boasts more than a hundred million believers; and after the vicissitude of twelve eventful centuries, Mohammed shews an equal number following in his train. Greater than all these put together in its mighty sway, greater too in the grasp and clearness of its religious philosophy, the marvellous system, Buddhism, is at this hour the creed of nearly five hundred millions of the race. Looking at these facts, then, can we not

fancy the question, Is Christianity a failure ? being one day asked with exulting scorn, and answered with sorrowful misgiving. It is the favourite stratagem of modern sceptics to assume the air of patrons, and speak of our faith with tolerant condescension as admirable indeed among the religions of humanity, but only a human growth after all. In the modern museums of religion Christianity, duly labelled, is set side by side with pagan systems, and chatted over or lectured over with the serenest confidence by the dogmatists of free thought, who can prove, entirely to their own satisfaction, what laws and workings of the mind have evolved the peculiar doctrines of the New Testament. Possibly this pernicious notion, petted now by select coteries of thinkers, may in time become popular with the ignorant and unreflecting. What is now an esoteric doctrine may broaden into a common axiom. The rough and ready logic of the crowd may argue that if Christianity were divine, it would be all-prevalent among men. The continents where the Cross has never been reared, the swarming myriads upon

whose unblessed ears the music of the name of Jesus has never broken—these may be cited as crushing refutations of the sublime assertions of Christian theology. The universal promises of the Adorable Redeemer may be confronted by the partial achievements of His faith ; and He Himself may be adduced as an example of the rashness that begins what it cannot finish. All this will of necessity be a sore trial to the people of God. Over and over again the dark thought will overcast their minds, perhaps *we* are wrong, and these scoffers right. So, in prospect of that fierce, killing unbelief which shall be predominant in the last days, Christ asks, *When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth ?*

Another appearance of failure in Christianity may be *its actual loss of authority over men of science and thought.*

There is a growth of philosophy rising up around us which, if it does not, in words, deny the existence of God, tries to bar Him out from

interference with mundane affairs. A revolution, an earthquake, a pestilence, the decline of a religion, or the decay of a state are not looked at as manifestations of the Divine Will, but simply as the regular working of the machinery of nature ; and the machinery of nature is somehow represented as self-creating and self-sustaining. The whole tendency of this Philosophy is to make out that the universe, in all things material and mental, is, so to speak, *self-evolving* : its inherent forces and properties are sufficient to produce whatever we observe. We are not, indeed, told what is the Cause of causes. We are not told who first endued this universal frame with these marvellous forces and properties. But the idea of God as a personal, conscious, active Being, steering affairs is resented as a positive impertinence. Now between this atheistic philosophy and Christianity there is deadly enmity. For, in the teeth of this system of metaphysics, Christianity asserts the historical fact that God has interfered with human affairs. Christianity asserts that, over and

over again, forces from outside have been introduced into this world. Unless Christianity is false, things have happened in history which were not caused by the ordinary efforts of nature, nor by the working of the human will. To some men of science this statement is positively irritating. Give them anything they can drop into a test-tube or place under a microscope ; set before them any revolution of power or thought for which they can assign adequate cause, and they are content. But tell them that God is constantly sustaining what they call the order of nature, that He has repeatedly overruled that order for His own purpose, and they scarcely listen with patience. Shallow, inefficient as this philosophy is, it is rapidly becoming prevalent; and wherever it prevails there the theory of Christianity loses influence. Nor does it seem to me improbable that, in a mercenary, luxurious age, the minds of men will offer little opposition to the advances of such a system. Should it be so, at the time of Christ's second coming, this may be another

source of painful temptation to the children of God. If science should ever become a preacher of materialism ; if the intellect of the world should become avowedly atheistic ; if large and educated sections of society should be taught that there is no God, no soul, no immortality, that Christianity is the coinage of schemers and fools ; if the Church of the future should be a small and feeble band, with numbers, wealth, power, culture, intellect arrayed in a dazzling host against her ; would not this be a sore trial of faith ? Does not the very thought deepen the gravity of the question, *When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth ?*

I come to touch on a more personal matter. *Perhaps at Christ's second coming Christianity will appear to be a failure, because its moral influence will be feeble.*

It is the glory of our religion that it is nothing if not practical. It is the glory of our religion that it first attracts the affections and then convinces the understanding. For this reason wherever

Christianity is presented truthfully to the world by a pure, self-denying, devoted Church, there not even the pride of human intellect can with success dispute its authority. Oh, the eloquence of saintliness ! Lives fragrant with sanctity, what strong subtle influence they wield ! A genuine Christian man or woman, sound of heart and clear of head, no poor, partial distorted imitation of Christ, but a character broad and luminous with the fulness of gospel truth, this is a defender of the faith who need not fear comparison with any doctor or father of history. With theological views, which neither cramp the play of his intellect nor stop the flow of his feelings, large in understanding, catholic in sympathy, human in tenderness, honest to man, and devout before God, oh, what majesty there is in a Christian ! Wholesome in his dealings, kindly in intercourse, winning in conversation, severe against pretence and wrong, compassionate to the fallen, tender to the suffering, that life rolls on like a river, that passes with one fixed purpose through changing scenes, sparkling in the sunshine

and serious in the shade, now hurrying on swift as an arrow, now slow and deep and still and strong, rippling into pleasantry, or carrying heaven in its serene breast, but always onward to the sea—so a Christian lives ! But we, baptized members of the Church of Christ, how do we live ? Are we patterns of virtue ? Do we show this wholeness of grace, or anything like it ? When a censorious world studies our behaviour what sees it ? The Christian man, narrow, bigoted, austere, straining at some gnat of ritual or doctrine, while he swallows that negation of the gospel—hatred of a brother ? The Christian man, quick to take an advantage in traffic, driving the hardest bargains, paying his servants, or his workmen, or his clerks the lowest wages that his own hoards may increase ? The Christian man exclusive, proud, priding himself on birth, or money, or brains, more at his ease with a wealthy sinner than with a poor saint ? Christian society as fashionable, as frivolous, as dressy, as gossiping as any other society.? Does the censorious world, I say, see lives like that in the Church ? Oh, if it

does, as we speak of decaying faith, never let us charge men of thought, or men of science, with propagating unbelief! We, with our lying professions, are the opponents of the truth. We, with our absorbing worldliness, are the apostles of atheism. And thinking what luxury, indolence, selfishness are cankering the vitals of godliness, well may we shudder to hear our Master's solemn question, *When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?*

What will the coming of the Son of Man be? Sometimes we are told, the inauguration of a reign of splendour, when for a thousand years Christ and His Saints will have dominion on earth. Many and glowing are the pictures ardent fancies have drawn of this coming age of gold. But I rather believe that there is a better future in store for the church. When Christ comes again, whatever that expression means, I think it will be to energize failing spiritual strength, to shed light on dark places of thought, to solve earnest doubts, to fulfil pious expectations,

to bring in a new spiritual dispensation of vaster promise and mighter working than our own.
Even so, come Lord Jesus!

For let none ever think that we who believe, or even consider it probable, that Christianity may for a time decline in power, have any doubt of its final pre-eminence. Perhaps by slow, imperceptible degrees the Cross will conquer the world. Or, perhaps, gathering new force in a new dispensation, the Cross may do in years the work of centuries. Of this we are confident : conquer It will. Neither past failure, nor failures in the future, foreboded by clouds that even now darken over us, are able to shake our confidence. The Cross will conquer. We have spoken of numerical failure, and have seen the disheartening contrast that exists between Christianity and Paganism. But it by no means follows that missionary work has been a failure. The Jewish synagogues, scattered here and there over the old empire, seemed contemptible in their numerical insignificance, powerless for mental or

religious influence. But the student of history knows what a wonderful advantage these synagogues gave to the first preachers of the gospel. They became everywhere centres, whence there radiated that new Thought which soon permeated the known world. We have spoken of intellectual failure. We have seen how much there is to apprehend from that proud, daring spirit of enquiry which believes only what it must believe—the spirit which is fruitful of a dark materialism that ignores the spiritual life of mankind. It is a sad spectacle—sad alike to the scientifically religious, and to the religiously scientific. Yet it may be that this contest between the defenders and assailants of Revelation may issue in a more careful definition of the duties of Reason and Faith; and when the boundaries of the two kingdoms are clearly marked out, that long, sad warfare may cease. Even with regard to the moral failure of Christianity—though here it is more difficult to speak—may we not hope that a day will come when, snapping the fetters of luxury, pride, and

wealth, the Church will reproduce in her members the glory of the life of Christ? Whatever comes, vicissitude, disaster, defeat, *at the end of the days*, Christ shall stand victorious. That is no idle vaunt. It is no showy assertion, coined for rhetorical display. We firmly believe that our Blessed Saviour is King of Humanity. We believe He has revealed the truth, for which the fairest and wisest of our race have sought in vain. The more closely we study His words, His works, Himself, deeper is the conviction graven on our hearts that He is the Son of God. When we consider the loveliness of His character we are convinced that all earnest doubts regarding Him spring from misconception, and will one day be changed into devout belief. When we behold the majesty of His character we smile at the poor cavils of those whose natural evil is stirred to malignity by the presence of Perfect Virtue. Vain against Him are ingenuous objections or disingenuous attacks. The waves that fret and rage against the rock wear it away by their unceasing activity. But every wave of enmity that beats

Paraphrase on the Second Advent.

The world is won. Christ and His
Truth remain invincible. The storm is
over and the day of human prejudice and
error is passing away when these
two stand saving. Him alone is
the true Son of God the So
n of man. He is the author of existence and
the source of all good. In earth and
heaven no words, shall low, confess
the truth, the glory of God the Father.



W. H. Brewster, 3, Bridge Street, Bath.

184 *Thoughts on the Second Advent.*

upon Him beats in vain. Christ and His work share a common immortality. The storm of human passion and the fogs of human prejudice are only for a time. The hour is coming when these must subside and vanish, leaving Him alone, in unapproachable majesty, the Son of God, the Son of Man, at whose Name all orders of existence, angels *in heaven*, suffering saints *in earth*, and the departed just *under the earth*, shall bow, confessing that He is Lord *to the glory of God the Father.*



Digitized by Google

